

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH, FOUNDER OF THE
MORMON CHURCH: AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO
AMERICA'S RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

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by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Few if any topics in American history have been written on so extensively as that of Joseph Smith and his Mormon co-religionists. The historian in gazing through files of Mormoniana will search almost without end for a single unbiased account of Joseph Smith and his followers.

Numerous works have been published by the official Mormon church, known presently as the Latter-Day Saints, attempting to portray the life of Joseph Smith as being that of a "true prophet," and his followers as "Saints." An endless array of works has been published throughout the years by bitter enemies of Mormonism which have served as exposés of the supposed vile practices attributed to the Mormons. These works include among them such titles as, "The Truth About Mormonism," "The Mormon Menace," "Mormonism Exposed," "Mormonism Unveiled," and "The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism." The titles denote their obvious content as well as their caliber.

A great degree of difficulty is encountered by the historian when attempting to differentiate between fact and myth when dealing with a religious leader. This can best be illustrated by the following as stated by Morgan:

As with his contemporary, Abraham Lincoln, and to even more marked degree, there is about the life of Joseph Smith extraordinary difficulty in getting at the man himself inside the encrustation of legend. Apotheosis has been the lot of each man, but in the case of the Mormon prophet something exactly akin to deification has been at work.¹

Fortunately there are numerous, contemporary American historians of varying degrees of acceptability who wrote concerning Joseph Smith as the true prophet of the Mormon or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Therefore, writers and students of Joseph Smith and Mormonism have access to many sources, some accepting Joseph Smith as a prophet, and some with certain reservations.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to: (1) investigate the current literature in the field of historiography with a view of carrying out a valid historical research project, (2) investigate the historical literature relative to the life of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, (3) make a comparison of the conflicting viewpoints of pro-Mormon and anti-Mormon writers and attempt to determine the

¹Dale L. Morgan, "A Prophet and His Legend," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (November 24, 1945), 7.

effects and contributions made by Joseph Smith to American history, and (4) create a mental image of the man himself as background material for a better understanding of the religious movement which bears the impress of his personality.

Importance of the study. The importance of the study was to allow the writer to familiarize himself with the techniques and methods of the independent researcher seeking to facilitate a study in historiography.

In addition, a concomitant aspect of the importance of this study would be to furnish valuable experience to the writer as a high school history teacher, to restrict himself with a given set of events, circumstances, and occurrences within a specific time spectrum and attempt to formulate a series of conclusions based upon research and acquaintance with numerous sources.

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One problem that constantly confronts the historian, when dealing with a personality in history, especially that of a religious leader, is that of objectivity versus emotionalism. Therefore, to facilitate the historiographic approach, the writer must at all times maintain an objective perspective. It is, of course, extremely difficult to

achieve objectivity at all times because of the problem of unconscious bias involved.

The writer is aware of the complexities encountered when attempting to bring forth a study restricted by the element of time and the fact that the writer would be regarded as a "gentile," or "outsider," which is the appropriate term used to designate all non-Mormons. It is hoped that the writer has avoided an unconscious bias in the search for accuracy and fact.

Since today's historiography must be based upon the words of contemporary observers who reflect their religious, political, and emotional inclinations, one can expect widely conflicting views on the subject. Many of the early primary sources have been criticized because of their obvious slanted views and their deletion of statements detrimental to the subjects being discussed. Archival materials in the form of personal journals, diaries, biographies, and personal first-hand observations of early Mormons have been withheld in instances in which the Church was able to determine that the intent of the writer was to malign the character of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

III. PROCEDURE

The procedure used to complete this study was library research carried out at numerous midwestern libraries. An investigation into the methods, techniques, and procedures of historiography was conducted to acquaint the writer with the accepted authorities in the field of history and their voluminous writings which serve as a guide for the novice attempting to acquire the familiarity with methods and source materials necessary to such a study.

A perusal of the vast number of sources both primary and secondary, the works of a definite bias, either pro or anti-Mormon were consulted to render this study as a valid attempt at historical accuracy.

IV. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions of terms used in this study are presented:

Mormon. A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints founded by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830, at Seneca county, township of Fayette, New York was called a Mormon.

The term Mormon or Mormonite was vulgarly applied to early adherents of the faith by people outside the movement. With some reservations it came into general use among the church members themselves in the early church.

It was rejected by the Reorganized Church members largely because they did not want to be identified in the public mind with the church in Utah.¹

Saints. A common designation, "Saints," was used by the Mormons when referring to themselves; was contemporary in the period of 1830-1880's. This term is used presently by those members of the Utah church as a common abbreviation of Latter-Day Saints. The use of the word "Saints" by non-Mormons was to be thought of as an attempt at blasphemy or mockery of the principles of the Mormon or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Hickory Mormon. The more liberal element within the Mormon church; usually found among the younger Mormons was called "Hickory Mormon."

Jack Mormon. "Gentiles" or non-Mormons who sympathize with the Mormons were called "Jack Mormons."

Gentile. The term used by Mormons or Latter-Day Saints to refer to all non-believers or non-Mormons is "Gentile."

Proselytes. Those individuals converted to Mormonism were called proselytes.

¹Garland E. Tickemyer, "The Philosophy of Joseph Smith and Its Educational Implications" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas, Austin, 1963), p. 9.

Apostate. Those members of the Mormon or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who forsook or abandoned their religion or former beliefs and principles and withdrew from the Mormon religious community were called "apostate."

Millennialism. The religious conviction that Christ and the Judgment were at hand from the 1820's to 1845 was called "Millennialism."

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON HISTORIOGRAPHY

Much has been written in regard to the theory and practice in historical study, and the techniques, methods of criticism, and interpretation involved in a study of a historical nature. A brief summary of the various aspects of historiography will be presented to facilitate the writing of a report in keeping with the basic principles of the historical approach.

I. LITERATURE ON DEFINITION AND NATURE OF HISTORY

Any attempt to present a valid definition of the term "history" necessarily involves individual interpretation. The nature or exact meaning of the word appears to be ambiguous. It has been asserted by Henry Steele Commager, in The Study of History, that history "means the past and all that happened in the past. It means, too, the record of the past--all that men have said and written of the past, or in the succinct words of Jacob Burckhardt, "what one age finds worthy of note in another."¹ Many historians and philosophers have

¹Henry Steele Commager, The Study of History (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1966), p. 1.

advocated that the past exists only in the record of it or in the awareness of it. This is to say, that without any such record of the past, there would be no meaningful past. A surface implication results from this school of thought, thereby suggesting that all history is of a contemporary nature. Commager further observed, "The past is not dependent on us for its existence, but exists in its own right."¹ Historians who seek to clarify a mystery or puzzle of the past through the introduction of new materials do not create the past, though they may recreate it.

John W. Best, in his basic instructional manual, Research in Education, has defined history as "a complete, accurate, and meaningful record of man's achievement. It is not merely a list of chronological events, but a truthful, integrated account in which persons and events are examined in relation to a particular time and place."² A previous reference has been made to the fact that individuals and ideas are not to be viewed in complete isolation. The inter-relationship of these various components of history can best be illustrated by the following statement: "No man can be subjected to historical investigation without some consideration of his contribution to the ideas, movements, or

¹Ibid.

²John W. Best, Research in Education (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 85.

institutions of a particular time or place."¹

Many historians have suggested or advanced the theory that the term "history" in popular usage has two very different meanings. One theory asserts that history is to be regarded as a science or body of knowledge that seeks to impart truth. This is not to imply that other fields or disciplines of knowledge do not share this similar goal. One caution which the historian should observe is that of resisting the temptation to degrade history as a mere collecting of past events. To accept the idea that history is a science would be to align one's self with the school of Ranke and J. B. Bury who have implied that history and science are interrelated because of their structure and compatibility. Through the study of history man is able to find out about himself and accept or reject the facts according to his individual disposition or motives. The explanation offered by V. H. Galbraith that history "is the science of men in time," does much to satisfy those attempting to present an all inclusive definition of general acceptability.²

A second theory suggests that history is essentially a story and has an impressive array of authorities who would

¹Ibid., p. 86.

²V. H. Galbraith, An Introduction to the Study of History (London: C. A. Watts & Company, Ltd., 1964), p. 3.

tend to substantiate this belief. One of history's most renowned writers, G. M. Trevelyan, commented regarding a definition of history: "The historian's first duty is to tell the story," and that "History is, in its unchangeable essence, a 'tale'."¹

The use of a narrative or story to describe a historical event such as the account written by Herodotus, "The Father of History," of the struggle between the Greeks and Persians, serves as one of the earliest examples of history as a story. His purpose, he related, was "to preserve the memory of the great events that had occurred during the wars and of the heroic deeds that had been performed on both sides."² The Iliad and the Odyssey combine both the elements of history and story-telling; as a consequence, one of the present generation is in a state of confusion in attempting to classify them as literature or history. An investigation of the principles and criteria dealing with history and literature suggests that they are both.

The historian must develop the art of relating the most complicated story ever told--that of man and his past.

¹G. J. Renier, History Its Purpose and Method (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), p. 35.

²John L. Beatty and Oliver A. Johnson, Heritage of Western Civilization (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 5.

The inclusion of facts through documentation and careful organization prevents the story from becoming simply imaginative literature. The historian is thus confronted with the task of recovering and reconstructing that which actually happened.

The writing of effective history dictates compliance with rigid and exact standards. Thus, commented Beatty:

The story-teller must respect those qualities that are the essence of good historical writing: accuracy in assembling and presenting facts, right reason in analyzing the facts, and sobriety and judgment in interpreting the facts. But even the possession of these qualities will not insure that an author will write good history, for story-telling is above all else an act of communication, and an author who fails to communicate fails to tell the story.¹

As a result of repeated misuse of the term "history," the Social Science Research Council, in 1946, in its report Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography, offered the following definition: "History-as-actuality means all that has been felt, thought, imagined, said, and done by human beings as such and in relation to one another and to their environment since the beginning of mankind's operations on this planet."²

¹Ibid.

²Social Science Research Council, Theory and Practice in Historical Study (A Report of the Committee on Historiography; New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), p. 5.

This definition is of a general nature and tends to support those brought forth earlier in this report.

In short, history can be thought of as a record. As to its function, observed Commager:

It collects and organizes such facts as are available and relevant, provides some kind of framework for them, and lays down the guidelines for the presentation. It supplies order, harmony, direction, for what might otherwise be a chaotic assemblage of miscellaneous facts.¹

The problems of incompleteness and of fragmentation are obstacles faced by the historian during the compilation of the story or record. One has only to think of the thousands of years of history before the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg that have gone unrecorded for posterity to realize this fact. Practicality suggests that the individual historian is unable to peruse the multitudinous sources of history without realizing that complete coverage of the past is neither possible nor practical.

An additional problem is encountered by the historian in the matter of collection, organization, and interpretation of the sources at his disposal. The opportunity to be selective as well as discretionary is in evidence in the matter of materials to be utilized. The three-fold problem of collection, organization, and interpretation has been frequently

¹Commager, op. cit., p. 3.

discussed and debated by historians; professor Commager has perhaps dealt in a direct sense with this problem when he stated:

No individual scholar can go very far in the collection of his material; mostly it has been done for him, over the years and the centuries, by earlier scholars: by archivists who have preserved manuscripts and records; by devoted librarians who have assembled manuscripts and books, organized them, classified them, and protected them, by government officials who have provided for the preservation of court or diplomatic records; and by editors who have organized these.¹

Logically, the problem of interpretation seems to have made the greatest demands upon historians because of the degree of intelligence and judgment required in making specific philosophical and value judgments. This will be discussed briefly in a later segment of this report.

II. LITERATURE ON THE CRITICISM OF HISTORY

Historical criticism is necessitated by the fact that historical writing gives the appearance of being a matter of creative imagination which invites a certain amount of unconscious bias on the part of the writer. Sources collected for the purpose of restoring the historical past do not in themselves contain the actual facts, but are mere affirmations of facts that are related through witnesses attempting to recreate what was believed to have happened. Historical scholarship has sought to establish, by agreement of two or

¹Ibid., p. 6.

more sources or independent witnesses, the validity of certain facts. The individual sources must be evaluated and the relationship of the sources to each other must be studied to determine whether they are dependent or independent.

Mention must be made of the fact that historians are incapable of being present when history is in the making, therefore, direct observation becomes an impossibility in most instances. Utilizing data obtained from those who witnessed or participated in the historical events, means, wrote Best, "the data must be subjected to careful analysis to sift the true from the irrelevant, false, or misleading."¹

Historical criticism as a science had its origins in the nineteenth century primarily as a result of existing handicaps. Professor George Peabody Gooch, in his scholarly and informative account of the development of historiography in the nineteenth century, contended that previous to the nineteenth century historiography was limited by four serious handicaps:

- (1) the catastrophic theory of historical causation and the contempt for the medieval period which had characterized the Rationalist school;
- (2) the absence of adequate collection of original sources and of any organization of archival materials;
- (3) the widespread lack of critical methods in handling historical materials; and
- (4) the failure to provide for any systematic and

¹Best, op. cit., p. 90.

competent teaching of either the subject matter or methods of history.¹

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century has been offered as a possible explanation of the increased number of collections of source materials related to the various nations of Europe giving evidence of concern on the part of the governments regarding historical documentation of their country's past.

According to Barnes, the development or emergence of the scientific historical method proceeded through two stages:

First, the rise of those auxiliary sciences--such as diplomatic, chronology, paleography, epigraphy and lexicography--which would enable the historian to ascertain the genuineness of a document; and, second, the growth of internal or interpretative criticism, which passes beyond the mere establishment of the authenticity of a document and examines the credibility of its author as a witness of historical facts.²

The Benedictine monks of the Congregation of Saint-Maur were indirectly responsible for the collection of the early sources of French history and as a consequence were in turn responsible for the first important steps in the growth of modern historical science and the art of historiography. Indications are that they possessed a distinct advantage over lay writers in that they were not required to exalt a particular dynasty, city, et cetera. Utilizing the seclusion of

¹Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), p. 239.

²Ibid., pp. 239-40.

the library of their monastery they refined the techniques and mechanics of the modern historian. Previous to this time few attempts were evidenced in regard to the citation of sources or the establishment of the authenticity of a text.

With the realization of the fact that the object of criticism is to discover what in a document may be accepted as true, the historian may then proceed to analyze the problem confronting him. Analysis begins with the type of investigative process known as external criticism; the process that, according to Best, "establishes the authenticity or genuineness of data."¹ Various techniques and tests of determining the genuineness of a manuscript or document may be employed. However, certain primary questions must be answered before any degree of perceptibility is to be achieved with regard to the problem of determining whether a document is authentic or spurious. Is the document complete? Does the document have the appearance of having been edited? Is the document an original or a copy of the original? Have the facts been presented in their proper perspective and general time spectrum? G. Kitson Clark, in The Critical Historian, instructed the historian to turn his attention to one fundamental question: "Am I quite sure that I know what the

¹Best, loc. cit.

words used meant to the writer?"¹ Many historians have labored under a false assumption that certain words written by others were intended to mean what they would have meant, if they themselves had used them.

The likelihood of encountering false or fraudulent documents becomes prominent when dealing with what may be termed official documents, those with the stamp or endorsement of public authority. The charge that many documents have produced a hypnotic effect upon the minds of the user because of the stamp of being official has led to the conclusion that public records and archival materials have not always been under meticulous care, thereby allowing the opportunity to produce false or documents subject to forgery.

An additional problem is created when the reluctance of institutions such as churches and states to make available documents of recent origin is considered. Free and unhindered accessibility to recent historical official records is a necessity for the historian who would attempt to utilize the sources maintained by a government to describe an incident of direct bearing upon the course of a specific country's history. Countries often rigidly observe an unwritten rule that their national archives should not be

¹G. Kitson Clark, The Critical Historian (London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., 1967), p. 63.

made immediately accessible to the public and historians in general, until a period of twenty years has transpired after the events or occurrences in question have taken place. Strict compliance with this rule places the historian at a decided disadvantage and seriously limits or restricts him in his quest for primary or original sources to supplement or augment his research.

Ch. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos remarked that historians have erroneously assumed on many occasions that external criticism is the whole of historical criticism, and "that beyond the purgation, emendation, and classification of documents there is nothing left to do."¹ This form of reasoning has led to the formation of illusions that are scarcely deserving of consideration when a practical application of the methods and techniques of the historian are to be considered. It has been said:

The sure methods of external criticism have raised history to the dignity of a science, "of an exact science"; that critical investigations of authorship "enable us, better than any other study, to gain a profound insight into past ages"; that the habit of criticizing texts refines or even confers the "historical sense."²

¹Ch. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, Introduction to the Study of History (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1912), p. 113.

²Ibid.

Once the acceptability or authenticity of a historical document has been determined, the matter of its evaluation or internal criticism must be dealt with. Internal criticism has as its basic intent the establishment of specific questions that seek to reveal the reliability of the document. This is to say that while a document may be genuine, its accuracy and worthiness are subject to scrutiny. Considering that the object of historical criticism is to discover what in a document may be accepted as true, the historian is forced to determine the objectives or motives of the author. Realization of the fact that a special study of the character of an author or writer is impractical, the historian must then proceed to determining that the sincerity of the writer or author may be questionable, and that the writer may have been mistaken in his sources of information.

Critical historians have on occasion detected attempts to deceive those who would make use of official documents. A tendency to present false information in order to serve a collective interest is in evidence in the writings of some authors of historical fact. One of the primary difficulties detected by Langlois and Seignobos is that:

An author is a member at one and the same time of several different groups, a family, a province, a country, a religious denomination, a political party, a class in society, whose interests often

conflict; we have to discover the group in which he took most interest, and for which he worked.¹

The historian must determine the situation or circumstances in which the author or writer was compelled to write. Was he compelled to violate truth by the use of customs or rules in keeping with local and national traditions? If the author states that conditions were in all instances normal, he is then guilty of making a false declaration. Accounts of the exact location, time, and those present or participating in a significant historical event, are often slight deviations from the truth that can be attributed to unconscious bias.

Other considerations and motives of the author of an official historical document should be examined in an attempt to effectively utilize the technique of internal criticism. Can it be accurately determined that the author was in sympathy with an individual, group, political party, nation, religion, or school of philosophy? Has the author purposely sought to glorify or exalt himself or his group: for what purpose? Finally, the critical historian in his evaluation of a document must determine whether the author may have been attempting to satisfy his reading public.

In summation, reference to the value of criticism and the inadvisability of separating man into individual units

¹Ibid., p. 167.

according to the degree of truth or lack of bias present in his writings, is directed to the statement of a noted historian, James Harvey Robinson, writing in The New History.

Nothing could be more artificial than the scientific separation of man's religious, aesthetic, economic, political, intellectual and bellicose properties. These may be studied, each by itself, with advantage, but specialization would lead to the most absurd results if there were not someone to study the process as a whole; and that someone is the historian.¹

III. LITERATURE ON INTERPRETATION IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historian, fully realizing that interpretation involves falsification and inaccuracy, is confronted with the task of identifying the objectivity of the author or writer and those biases present in his writing. Commager, commenting on the general character of the historian, stated:

Let us admit at once that history is neither scientific nor mechanical, that the historian is human and therefore fallible, and that the ideal history, completely objective and dispassionate, is an illusion. There is bias in the choice of a subject, bias in the selection of material, bias in its organization and presentation, and, inevitably, bias in its interpretation. Consciously, or unconsciously, all historians are biased: they are creatures of their time, their race, their faith, their class, their country--creatures, and even prisoners.²

In relation to the interpretation of the causes of history or "causal interpretation" as it is known, historians

¹Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, The Modern Researcher (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), pp. 152-53.

²Commager, op. cit., p. 53.

on occasion have singled out a contributory cause and elevated that cause to the status of being a "main," cause, the "primary," cause, or the "most important," cause which then, becomes a matter of semantics. In the observation of a historical event, each witness or participant reveals a degree of exact and erroneous knowledge. A famous American historian of the Civil War and Reconstruction, William A. Dunning, was convinced that:

In history what the contemporaries of an event believed it to be is truer--more genuinely 'the past'--than anything discovered by later research and which the contemporaries did not know. Their views had consequences, whereas ours about their times played no part in the web of thought and action.¹

Interpretation in the field of historiography involves the ability to detect the "frame of reference" of the author or selector. The eminent American historian, Charles A. Beard, commented regarding the fact that many historians have made no attempt to avoid bias and have made a virtue of it: "Any selection and arrangement of facts," he said in his address on "History as an Act of Faith," "pertaining to any large area of History, either local or world, race or class, is controlled inexorably by the frame of reference in the mind of the selector or arranger."²

¹Barzun and Graff, op. cit., p. 141.

²Commager, loc. cit.

Understanding of the past is simplified when the sources, documents, and literature are voluminous, and the standards, habits, and morals of the past are comparable with those of the period in which the historian is a participant.

Commager offered a final commentary on historiography when he stated:

Even those who are most anxious to avoid imposing their own standards on the past and strive most sincerely to see the past in its own terms are tempted to make one exception to their principle. That is in the realm of moral judgment. Let us not force the past into the straitjacket of the present, they say, but at the same time let us not suspend the eternal rules of right and wrong.¹

IV. SPECIFIC HISTORIOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS RELATING TO JOSEPH SMITH AND HIS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORMONISM

The study of a religious personality requires the historian to strive for impartiality and objectivity while presenting the various prevailing attitudes and writings relative to an individual and the religion or sect with which he is identified. The element of bias is a dominant factor in such a study because of the individual interpretations of the individual, his origins, spirituality, motives, and the nature of the church he founded. In reference to the religion founded by Joseph Smith, the subject of this study,

¹Commager, op. cit., p. 60.

Tickemyer stated: "There is probably no religion which from its very beginning has been as completely chronicled as has Latter Day Saintism."¹ Because of the dominant religious background, writings that deal with the person of Joseph Smith and his followers tend to be of a highly controversial nature. Available sources are of a definite pro-Mormon or anti-Mormon bias. As a result of the individual prejudices and biases projected in the literature it has been found by scholars and students of Joseph Smith and Mormonism that varied interpretations are common. Evidence of the possibility of personal bias on the part of pro-Mormon writers can be witnessed in the following statement by Tickemyer:

With an apparent awareness of the historical importance of events which were transpiring in his day, Joseph Smith counseled his followers to keep a careful record of their individual as well as their group experiences. With a reverence for the past which amounts almost to ancestral worship, the families of Utah have carefully preserved the journals which were faithfully kept by those who obeyed the counsel of the Prophet.²

Pawn M. Brodie, generally regarded as the definitive biographer of Joseph Smith, commented regarding the available documents:

The task of assembling these documents-of sifting first-hand accounts from third-hand plagiarism, of fitting Mormon and non-Mormon narratives into a mosaic that makes

¹Tickemyer, op. cit., p. 14.

²Ibid.

credible history, absorbing all the while the long-forgotten realities of religion and politics between 1805-1844 is not a dull one.¹

Any attempt to fully understand the Mormon founder is compounded by the statement made by Joseph Smith in a sermon delivered shortly before his death in 1844, "You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. I cannot tell it; I shall never undertake it. I don't blame anyone for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself."² Because of this challenge issued by the "Prophet" himself, mystery and mysticism have enshrouded his life. It has been estimated that more than sixty biographers have attempted to meet this challenge, resulting in studies of a sociological, economical, theological, and historical nature. As a result many misconceptions about Joseph Smith are prevalent. American historians and church historians have devoted their efforts to dispelling the beliefs and concepts blindly accepted by the American public which dwell upon the purient and pornographic details of early Mormonism commonly attributed to Joseph Smith himself.

The problem of external criticism in historiography with regard to Joseph Smith is especially in evidence because

¹Fawn M. Brodie, No Man Knows My History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. viii. Mrs. Brodie was born and raised a Mormon and is considered as a defender of Joseph Smith.

²Ibid., p. vii.

of numerous attempts at "editorial treatment" of written documents, diaries, and other works dealing with Joseph Smith by those concerned with presenting Smith as having entertained certain opinions and views beneficial to his church. Any attempt at perusal of the writings dealing with an individual must begin with the investigation into the personal diaries or journals maintained by the person himself. One such example of the problem of external criticism with reference to "editorial Treatment," is the journal kept by Joseph Smith published under the title, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet by Himself. One criticism leveled concerning the authenticity of this journal implies that a measure of revision or revamping has been determined. In reference to this "editorial treatment," witness the following statement by Charles Wandell, an employee of the Church Historian's office at Nauvoo in 1845, which stated:

. . . having been employed . . . in compiling this very autobiography, I know that after Joseph's death his memoir was "doctored" to suit the new order of things, and this, too, by the direct order of Brigham Young to Doctor Richards and systematically by Richards.¹

The official organ or newspaper of the church, the Times and Seasons, periodically carried portions of this journal during the actual lifetime of the "Prophet" himself.

¹Tickemyer, op. cit., p. 15.

Upon close examination of both the Times and Seasons publication and a later publication deemed official by the Utah church, it can be determined that interpolations are numerous. By way of example, there appears to be no mention of Brigham Young in the Times and Seasons; however, it appears in excess of eight times in the Utah publication, reconstructed in such a manner to appear as though the narration was by Smith himself. To illustrate this effort at interpolation, the writer refers to Volume I, page 295 where the entry reads: "About the 8th of November I received a visit from Elders Joseph Young, Brigham Young," ¹ Appearances indicate that an attempt was made to combine the journal of Brigham Young with that of the Prophet. To many Mormons and non-Mormons it has been made clear that the objective was to project Brigham Young as having a larger role in the affairs of the early church.

An additional problem and one of primary importance is that of separating fact from myth. Marvin S. Hill, writing in Church History, commented regarding an aspect of this problem:

It would seem that the historiography of Mormonism has been plagued by too much emotion, too much description and too little interpretation. Most of it has been written from too narrow a base. The greatest bulk has been confined within bounds more or less set

¹Ibid.

by the church, concerning itself with topics like the origin of the Golden Bible or the validity of Smith's revelations.¹

Written evidence exists in abundance concerning attempts on the part of boyhood acquaintances, opponents of Mormonism, apostates from the Mormon church, and personal enemies of Joseph Smith to discredit, ridicule, and subject to public contempt the founder of Mormonism through the use of signed affidavits which have since been proven lacking in integrity. Examples and evidence of such affirmations will be cited in Chapter III.

Historians attach greater confidence in facts and information obtained from primary sources such as letters, diaries, affidavits, newspapers, books, and autobiographies, than in secondary sources. Therefore, another problem common to the historian is those secondary sources written by authors whose objectivity is questionable, since secondary sources are comprised mainly of accounts or reports of persons who relate the observations of participants or witnesses of an event.

While scholarly research is much in evidence in the works of both pro-Mormon and anti-Mormon writers and their views appear to be well documented, church historians of both the Missouri and Utah factions have tended to react in an

¹Marvin S. Hill, "The Historiography of Mormonism," Church History, XXVIII (December, 1959), 425.

unfavorable manner toward writers of either group who have denied important conflicting sources. Close observation of such writings reveals a composite of both fact and fiction which is detrimental to the person being written about.

Mrs. Brodie's, No Man Knows My History, received acclaim as an Alfred A. Knopf prize-winning biography of Joseph Smith, but is regarded as suspect because of the author being raised in the traditions of the Mormon church. Her book is regarded by literary critics and historians as well, as an admission that Joseph Smith was in reality in the beginning "a conscious fraud and impostor," who later came to believe in the role to which destiny led him. She viewed Joseph Smith's role of "Prophet" as something slipped into by accident as he progressed from one deception to another. Possibly because of her Mormon background, Mrs. Brodie has brought forth an essentially sympathetic treatment of Joseph Smith. Smith is presented in the light of social and religious conditions existing at the beginning of the eighteen hundred's. The author considered Smith as a "ne'er-do-well," who with maturity overcame the twin character disabilities of ignorance and unimaginativeness to provide the leadership instrumental in the creation of the "true, revealed church."

The first attempt to write a comprehensive biography of Joseph Smith was John Henry Evans' Joseph Smith An American

Prophet, published in 1933. Evans, wrote in his introduction: "I have tried to give a scientific treatment of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet--that is, to present the available facts, without smothering these in opinion. This, I believe has never been done before."¹ Opinions of this standard work indicate that the writer failed to achieve the detachment desired. Joseph Smith An American Prophet contains numerous omissions which have rendered the study to be ineffective in the historical research involved; primarily because of the lack of bibliographical footnotes and references. As an example of the lack of historianship involved, James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington submitted the following as evidence:

He told of the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830, then explained in some detail the importance and religious significance of the Church's name, especially of the word "saint." But he failed to recognize that the name of the Church in 1830 was simply "The Church of Christ"; its present name was not adopted until 1838.²

Evans failed to make use of existing sources that tended to conflict with his personal opinions regarding Joseph Smith and Mormonism. It has been determined by historians that Evans was guilty of interjecting his personal interpretations of Smith

¹James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Origins in New York: An Introductory Analysis," Brigham Young University Studies: A Voice for the Community of LDS Scholars, IX (Spring, 1969), 262.

²Ibid.

in far too many instances which would tend to negate the findings of his work.

Further reference to the reliability of certain secondary sources due to the objectivity of the authors involved will be included in Chapter III, in that portion dealing with the doctrine of polygamy or "spiritual wifery."

Any thorough analysis of the problems of historiography must include mention of a term or phrase coined by the American historian, Charles A. Beard, "frame of reference." This term suggests that religion has a manner of imposing a "frame of reference" upon a writer depending upon his degree of religious committment. This committment is then determined by the value system the author brings to his subject. When an author chooses to allow his reasoning to be pervaded by his predispositions and prejudices, he is forming a "frame of reference" that will be conducive to narrow-mindedness and bias. A thorough investigation of the historical literature relative to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, abounds with illustrations of personal bias displayed by the writer through his "frame of reference." Beard concluded: "As long as this was true, it was only honorable for the historian frankly to acknowledge his 'frame of reference'--that is, his bias."¹

Accessibility to documents and other archival materials both primary and secondary is a necessity to the writer or

¹Commager, loc. cit.

investigator seeking to bring forth a contribution to the historical knowledge pertaining to a person or event. It can be stated with relative certainty that the access to the documents, memoirs, journals, et cetera, of Joseph Smith have been withheld in conjunction with church policy. This policy has resulted in discrimination directed against those writers of an obvious anti-Mormon disposition. Many writers are influenced by the conviction that their sole duty was to attack Joseph Smith and Mormonism at every opportunity.

A valuable contribution to the scholars of Joseph Smith and specifically those dealing with his origins is the Berrian Collection of Mormon materials of the New York Public Library which is highly regarded as a repository of sources for those engaged in research dealing with the founder of Mormonism. This collection is particularly esteemed because of its inclusion of several diaries of early disciples of Joseph Smith, thus proving invaluable in adding a vast amount of knowledge of this much discussed individual. The New York Public Library has adopted a policy of procuring books, early newspapers, and pamphlets relative to Joseph Smith and Mormonism which places within reach of the student ample material from which to form a fair judgment on the subject.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which has its headquarters in Independence, Missouri, has proven to be receptive to requests from writers and

scholars dealing with Joseph Smith and Mormonism due largely to the fact that this branch of the early church which has since separated from the Utah church has publicly refuted the "prophet" as a result of his alleged activities in connection with the doctrine of polygamy which he asserted was "revealed" to him. Therefore, archival materials concerned with Joseph Smith can be obtained with relative ease by writers motivated by the desire to vilify him as an impostor or fraud.

Finally, perhaps the most crucial or significant problem dealing with Joseph Smith and Mormonism is the matter of the state of mind of the writer. The writer must employ the use of introspection to determine for himself the answer to the question--do I carry a predisposition toward religion, and will it effect my ability to judge and evaluate the problems common to the study of a religious personality? Analysis of the writings of several non-Mormon writers reveals that a personal prejudice on the part of the writer has invalidated the evidence or facts as they are encountered.

A similar claim can be made in reference to the pro-Mormon writer or the writer whose writings are found to be in strict accordance with those beliefs entertained by the official church. Writings of this nature often give evidence of being the product of a search not for facts, but specific moral deductions sanctioned by the church with the intent to

delete or omit any references of a detrimental character. Narratives of Mormon or pro-Mormon writers have been made to rest upon Mormon sources of information as a policy of combating anything of an unfavorable nature with a general denial, which is regarded as the main weapon of the church.

Critics of Mormonism and Joseph Smith as the founder of the "true, revealed church," have sought to point out that Smith through the Book of Mormon, Doctrines and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, caused his supporters to remove themselves from the conscious worship of God, and focus their spiritual attention and petitions upon Smith the "prophet." Those writers who subscribe to this criticism bring such a predisposition to their writings and thereby fall victim to the caprice of self-deceit.

CHAPTER III

A SURVEY OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH AND MORMONISM

I. Woodbridge Riley, commenting on the esteem in which Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, is held, stated:

To read the flux of books on the founder of Mormonism, one might think there were no middle course between vilification and deification. To sectarians Joseph Smith appears an ignoramus, a fanatic, an impostor, and a libertine; to his followers-a prophet, a seer, a vicegerent of God, and a martyr.¹

It is with the above statement in mind that the writer seeks to call attention to the fact that an objective appraisal of the life and impact of Joseph Smith upon America's religious heritage is difficult to achieve in large measure because of the overabundance of propaganda, myths, and distortions which have as their sole intent either the discrediting of an individual who dared to found a church within the framework of a frontier that proved to be highly intolerant, or his defense and praise.

¹I. Woodbridge Riley, The Founder of Mormonism (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1902), p. 3. Riley is of a definite anti-Mormon disposition and originated the pioneer study of Joseph Smith as explained in terms of being paranoid.

To illustrate the impression Joseph Smith made upon people, Josiah Quincy, the mayor of Boston, remarked concerning an interview conducted with Smith during the summer of 1844:

It is by no means improbable, that some future textbook for the use of generations yet unborn will contain a question something like this: "What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen?" And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written: "Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet." And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants. History¹ deals in surprises and paradoxes as startling as this.

This writer will not attempt a thorough analysis of the life of Joseph Smith, rather he will focus his attention upon the presentation of selected historiographic questions concerning the role of Smith in the development of Mormonism. These questions will be selected on the basis of their general acceptability among scholars and historians as being pertinent to such a study.

The questions will be those which have served as dominant themes in the writings concerned with Joseph Smith and have promoted controversy on every hand. Because of the nature of the questions themselves, being concerned with

¹ John Henry Evans, Joseph Smith An American Prophet (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), pp. 3-4. Attempted to bring forth the first scientific, unbiased study of Smith, can be determined as supporting neither pro-Mormon or anti-Mormon viewpoint.

religion, the writer will attempt to avoid projections of personal opinions and biases and utilize the comparative writings and viewpoints of both pro-Mormon and anti-Mormon writers to present contemporary views whenever possible.

A brief summarization of the questions discussed is here offered to acquaint those unfamiliar with the subject of this study. Of primary concern to scholars and historians attempting to gain an understanding of Joseph Smith was his personal character and the surroundings from which he emerged. The writer selected the following question in an attempt to create a basis for the analysis of this much debated aspect of Joseph Smith. "What was the personal background and character of Joseph Smith and the conditions which led to his religious development?"

The focal point of historical investigation into the role of Joseph Smith and the evolution of Mormonism is centered around the question of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. In recognition of this fact, the writer selected the controversial matter of authorship of the Book of Mormon. The second question to be discussed was, "Was the Book of Mormon the result of divine revelation or was Joseph Smith its fraudulent author?"

Finally, consideration of the doctrine of polygamy and "spiritual wifery" will be discussed as a result of the social and religious practices attributed to the Mormons by those

hostile to Mormonism. Critics of Joseph Smith who seek to dismiss his claims of "divine inspiration" have asserted that he frequently proclaimed to his followers concerning matters of importance to himself. Many persons, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, asserted that Smith possessed a voracious appetite for women, married and single. The question of the origin and responsibility for the doctrine of polygamy and "spiritual wifery" becomes of importance. The third question was, "Did Joseph Smith create the doctrine of polygamy or spiritual wifery as a matter of personal expediency or was this the result of divine revelation?".

The questions selected for discussion are representative of the personal interests and preferences of the writer and are subject to criticism in regard to their selectivity.

I. WHAT WERE THE PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER OF
JOSEPH SMITH AND THE CONDITIONS WHICH LED
TO HIS RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT?

An old New England gazetteer, singing the charms of Vermont's villages and the glories of her heroes, strikes a discordant note when it comes to Sharon: "This is the birth-place of that infamous impostor, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, a dubious honor Sharon would relinquish willingly to another town."¹ Perhaps this estimate of Joseph Smith is

¹Brodie, op. cit., p. 1.

indicative of the "frame of reference" in which writers have presented the Mormon founder.

Joseph Smith was born on December 23, 1805, at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, the fourth of ten children of Joseph Smith, Senior, and Lucy (Mack) Smith. His parents were the descendants of stable New England families of Massachusetts and Connecticut, who later migrated to the Green Mountains of Vermont. Joseph Smith, Senior, and his wife, Lucy, were poor farmers, who had earned a livelihood at one time or another as schoolteachers; this fact would bear heavily upon the future life of their son who was thought of as being "unlettered."

Joseph Smith, Senior, the father of the future Mormon prophet, was considered a hard worker, but in the opinion of Inez Davis fell victim to his own overconfidence and clever speculators. Davis, in an attempt to compare the similarity of father and son in this respect, remarked:

His son inherited that overconfidence, and suffered for it. Though with the charm peculiar to those who have no thought of commercialism, he drew to his side many tried and true friends who would stay with him to the finish, yet to the end of his life the younger Joseph was never able to cope with the insidious advances and devious tactics of wily speculators and sycophants.¹

In the year 1816, known as the "year without a summer," and also as "eighteen-hundred-and-froze-to-death," the Smith

¹Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence, Missouri: Gerald Publishing House, 1948), p. 42. Davis, like Brodie is also a Mormon and writes in an attempt to exonerate, as well as explain Smith.

family made the decision to forsake the sickness and crop failures that had been their lot in Vermont for the lush hills of New York. The area near the township of Palmyra, then Ontario County, was selected as the site of their family farm, which was to provide the serenity that came to be identified with the wanderings of Joseph Smith and provided him a refuge from the harassment of hostile neighbors.

While the Smith family classified themselves as farmers, "most of their energies were spent as well as their incomes derived from the sale of homemade brooms, cordwood, maple syrup, and cakes made from the latter."¹ In addition to the above mentioned, Joseph Smith Senior supplemented their income by displaying a sign, "Cake and Beer Shop," selling "gingerbread, pies, boiled eggs, root beer, and other like notions," and he and his sons did odd jobs, gardening, harvesting, and well-digging, when they could get them."² Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of the future prophet, contributed to the family income by painting oil-cloth table covers.

¹William A. Linn, The Story of the Mormons (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 11. Linn is considered the most unbiased or unaligned account in existence.

²Pomeroy Tucker, Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), p. 12. Tucker was personally acquainted with the Smith family before the appearance of the Book of Mormon. He is to be considered as a writer of the Campbell-Hurlburt-Howe tradition.

The decision was made to move to a site two miles south of Palmyra, after residing three and a half years in the village itself; there, the family took possession of a piece of land near the border of Manchester. A small log house was built to shelter the destitute family who had occupied land without a title or deed. The elder Smith, sometime later, contracted to purchase the land and erected a farmhouse on it. This contractual agreement was to be negated and later presented in the form of affidavits, as testimony to the general lack of character of the entire Smith family.

According to Pomeroy Tucker, the Smiths were regarded by their neighbors in New York as "shiftless," "lazy," and "untrustworthy,"¹ and were never popular with or accepted by the people of Palmyra. Various personal estimates of the younger Smith exist, which reveal a tendency to avoid the strenuous labor associated with the occupation of farming. McBrien, commenting on the labor which Joseph Smith became attracted to, stated:

Ordinarily known in the neighborhood under the more familiar designation of Jo Smith, he may be said during his youth at Palmyra, to have been in all respects the type of the Western Pioneer. He was restless, shifting from place to place, and from this job to that. He was always looking for an easier way to make a living than by the relatively slow process of farm labor. Consequently, it is not, to be wondered that, enticed by the mystery of the "divining rod," he became a "witcher" for water with a well-digging crew; nor that, intrigued

¹Ibid.

by the schemes of some of the various treasure hunting parties that passed his way in those days, he should have joined them, changing his "witching stick" for a "peek stone."¹

Joseph's mother, Lucy Smith, attributed her son's actions to numerous illnesses and injuries he suffered while a child. An example of one of the maladies with which he was afflicted can be found in the chief literary effort of the prophet's mother, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations, in which a description of the affects on Smith as a six-year-old, of an attack of typhus is given:

Joseph recovered, but was left with an infected leg, necessitating an operation to remove a portion of bone. The principal surgeon ordered cords to be brought to bind Joseph fast to the bedstead, but to this Joseph objected. The doctor, however, insisted that he must be confined; upon which Joseph said, very decidedly, "No, doctor, I will not be bound, for I can bear the operation much better if I have my liberty." "Then, said Dr. Stone, "will you drink some brandy?" "No," said Joseph, "not one drop!" "Will you take some wine? You must take something, or you can never endure the severe operation to which you must be subjected." "No!" exclaimed Joseph, "I will not touch one particle of liquor, neither will I be tied down!"²

The operation was a success and the future prophet's leg was saved. While confined to his bed as a convalescent, Joseph

¹Dean Depew McBrien, "The Influence of the Frontier on Joseph Smith" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1929), pp. 8-9. McGrien is regarded as sympathetic to Mormonism.

²Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith and the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations (Plano, Illinois: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1880), p. 64, of an obvious pro-Mormon disposition.

Smith devoted much time to religious contemplation which was to have a lasting affect upon his later life.

Due in part to his many misfortunes, Joseph sought comfort in religion. A natural inclination toward religion is in evidence in the diaries and autobiographies of the Mack family especially. However, Joseph's maternal grandfather, Solomon Mack, was without schooling or religion. Descended from a line of Scotch clergymen, Solomon Mack, was denied the opportunity to achieve success by attending a seminary. Poverty demanded that the grandfather of Joseph Smith, devote his life to menial tasks involved in the service of others.

At the age of seventy-eight, Solomon Mack produced his contribution to the family heritage of authorship, when he succeeded in getting out his chapbook¹: A Narrative of the Life of Solomon Mack, containing an account of the many severe accidents he met with during a long series of years, together with the extraordinary manner in which he was converted to the Christian Faith. To which is added a number of Hymns, composed on the death of several of his relations.

Many historians have attempted to suggest that Joseph Smith and his grandfather, Solomon Mack, shared the misfortune of being raised in a similar manner, which involved a lack of

¹For the sake of convenience the writer has defined the term "chapbook" as a small book or pamphlet regarded as a source of popular tales and folk lore sold by itinerant merchants.

education and religion in their formative years. However, in the case of young Joseph, the revivalism and the pre-occupation with millennialism of the early nineteenth century New England, exposed him to the multitude of denominations that abounded during the period of the 1820's and 1830's. Mack, in his chapbook, reflects on his early years:

My father went to the door to fetch in a back-log, and returned after a fore-stick and instantly dropped down dead on the floor. You may see by this our lives are dependent on a supreme and independent God. . . . My Master was very careful that I should have little or no rest. From labour he never taught me to read or spoke to me at all on the subject of religion. . . . My mistress was afraid of my commencing a suit against them, she took me aside and told me I was such a fool we could not learn you. I was never taught even the principles of common morality, and felt no obligation with regard to society; and was born as others, like the wild ass's colt. I met with many sore accidents during the years of my minority.¹

Passages of this nature have been appropriated by anti-Mormon writers in an attempt to point out the religious inconsistencies apparent in such writings.

Harry M. Beardsley, in his work, Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire, adopted the popular theme of the anti-Mormon writer, when he described Joseph Smith as "impoverished, illiterate, a disreputable youth, the most notorious of a shiftless family."² Claims have been made that Joseph's

¹Riley, op. cit., p. 13.

²Harry M. Beardsley, Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), p. 6. Beardsley is strict in his reliance upon the Campbell-Hurlburg-Howe tradition.

mother, Lucy, displayed a definite favoritism toward her leisurely son and tended to regard him as superior mentally to his brothers and parents as well. While his mother thought of him as a genius, to his neighbors, "he was considered a likely candidate for the gallows."¹

Most available descriptions of Joseph Smith as a boy were written after he had become the founder of the Mormon church. The task of placing in the proper perspective the various personal descriptions and evaluations of Joseph Smith is complicated by many contemporaneous judgments that reflect serious concern regarding his personal character. A church historian made the following statement regarding Smith: "The incredible thing about Mormonism is that such a respectable religion could have derived from such a disreputable character."²

In his late twenties, after the birth of Mormonism, as noted by Carl Carmer, Joseph frankly admitted to much enjoyment as an adolescent when he stated:

As is common to most, or all youths, I fell into many vices and follies . . . and those imperfections to which I allude, and for which I have often had occasion to lament, were a light and, too often, vain mind

¹Ibid.

²C. F. Potter, The Story of Religion (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1929), p. 527. Potter cannot be adjudged as entertaining a definite view concerning support of the opposing theories in relation to Smith and Mormonism.

exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.¹

The majority of available descriptions exhibit resentment that a youth of Smith's reputation could command public attention. Little testimony of a favorable nature exists; however, those few must be regarded as unwilling, and, are deserving of consideration. Reported Daniel Hendrix, who had been a typesetter in those days:

I can see him now in my mind's eye, with his torn and patched trousers held to his form by a pair of suspenders made out of sheeting, with his calico shirt as dirty and black as the earth, and his uncombed hair sticking through the holes in his old battered hat.²

Smith was care-free and jovial, yet was seldom seen to laugh. "He was a good talker," remarked Hendrix, "and would have made a fine stump-speaker if he had the training. He was known among the young men I was associated with as a romancer of the first water. I never knew so ignorant a man as Joe to have such a fertile imagination. He could never tell a common occurrence in his daily life without embellishing the story with his imagination; yet I remember he was grieved one day when old Parson Reed told Joe he was going to hell for his lying habits."³

Historians have concluded that the personality of Joseph Smith was not atypical, but rather typical of the New England custom of admiring the narrator who could relate in detail an exaggerated tale and maintain a straight face. To be regarded as the "biggest liar in the county" was a highly respected

¹Carl Carmer, "The Farm Boy and The Angel," American Heritage, XIII (October, 1962), 86.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

accomplishment. One can imagine the dismay and concern of Smith after being rebuked by Parson Reed, who had apparently confused immoral lying with the imaginings of a creative mind.

Former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who became apostates as a result of activities and speech critical of Smith on occasion returned to the vicinity of Palmyra for the purpose of obtaining affidavits which would expose the many indiscretions and immoralities of his past previous to the discovery of the "golden plates." While many of the statements concerning Smith are couched in the Campbell-Hurlburt-Howe tradition¹, that of the nature of the exposé, they are suspect, due primarily to the fact that the accusers believed in the same superstitions that were cited as evidence of the depravity of the mind that had absorbed them.

To better understand the person himself, an English proselyte, Charlotte Haven, wrote "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," in the Overland Monthly, of December, 1890:

Joseph Smith is a large man, youthful in his appearance, with light complexion and hair, and blue eyes set far back in the head, and expressing great shrewdness, or I would say, cunning. He has a large head and phrenologists would unhesitatingly pronounce it a bad one, for the organs situated in the back part are decidedly most prominent. He is also very round shouldered. He had just returned from Springfield, where he had been upon

¹The use of the term Campbell-Hurlburt-Howe tradition refers to the attempt of Alexander Campbell, Philastus Hurlburt, and E. D. Howe through the publication of books, affidavits, and anti-Mormon newspaper articles, to prove that Smith was an impostor.

trial for some crime of which he was accused while he was in Missouri, but he was released by habeas corpus. I, who had expected to be overwhelmed by his eloquence, was never more disappointed than when he commenced his discourse by relating all the incidents of his journey. This he did in a loud voice, and his language and manner were the coarsest possible. His object seemed to be to amuse and excite laughter in his audience. He is evidently a great egotist and boaster, for he frequently remarked that at every place he stopped going to and from Springfield people crowded around him, and expressed surprise that he was so "handsome and good looking." He also exclaimed at the close of almost every sentence, "That's the idea!" . . . They say he is very kind hearted, and always ready to give shelter and help to the needy.¹

A more flattering or sympathetic description is that provided by John Doyle Lee, who was executed by the United States government for his complicity in the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857:

Joseph Smith was a most extraordinary man; he was rather large in stature, some six feet two inches in height, well built, though a little stoop-shouldered, prominent and well-developed features, a Roman nose, light chestnut hair, upper lip full and rather protruding, chin broad and square, an eagle eye, and on the whole there was something in his manner and appearance that was bewitching and winning; his countenance was that of a plain, honest man, full of benevolence and philanthropy and void of deceit or hypocrisy. He was resolute and firm of purpose, strong as most men in physical power, and all who saw were forced to admire him, as he then looked and existed.²

Joseph Smith was described in most accounts as being of rather coarse appearance owing to his family disposition

¹ Riley, op. cit., p. 5.

² John Doyle Lee, Mormonism Unveiled (St. Louis: M. E. Mason, Publisher, 1885), p. 76. Lee was a Mormon and upheld Smith in most instances.

which favored the sturdy features of the "Yankee" pioneer.

Smith is a coarse, plebian person in aspect, "remarked Reverend Henry Caswell, in 1842 in an attempt to describe the character and physical appearance of Joseph Smith, "and his countenance exhibits a curious mixture of the knave and clown. He has a downcast look and possesses none of the open and straight-forward expression which generally characterizes an honest man.¹

As could be expected, Joseph Smith made the deepest impressions upon his followers. Many regarded him as a veritable seer and prophet, divinely inspired by God, in the biblical sense. Intimates of Smith judged him according to their individual ages, sex, wealth, education, position in the church, nationality, and distance from him. One of the "Prophet's" early disciples, Amasa Lyman, stated the following regarding the presence of Smith:

Although there was nothing strange or different from other men in his personal appearance, yet, when he grasped my hand in that cordial way known to those who have met him in the honest simplicity of truth, I felt as one of old in the presence of the Lord. My strength seemed to be gone, so that it required an effort on my part to stand on my feet. But in all this there was no fear. The serenity and peace of heaven pervaded my soul, and the still, small voice of the Spirit whispered its living testimony in the depths of my being that he was a man of God.²

The famous Senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, known as the "Little Giant," knew Joseph Smith well. He spoke of Smith in 1844 to a Mormon apostle in Washington on the

¹Beardsley, op. cit., p. 266.

²Evans, op. cit., p. 5.

following and influence of the "Prophet":

If I could command the following of J. S., I would resign my seat in Congress and go to Oregon. In five years a noble state might be formed, and if they would not receive us into the Union, we would have a government of our own.¹

Brigham Young who wore the mantle of leader of the Mormon church upon the death of Joseph Smith was reported to have mentioned or called out the name of Smith on three occasions on his death bed. Young regarded Joseph Smith as the savior of the world and attempted to emulate his life in many respects. As a matter of curiosity, it has been noted that both Joseph Smith, the "Prophet," and Brigham Young, his successor, were born in the same state of Vermont. This has been offered as a plausible explanation of the fact that Young held his predecessor in the highest reverence. Shortly after his conversion to Mormonism, Brigham Young made this statement to a priest, which is stated in the Journal of Discourses:

If he acts like a devil, he has brought forth a doctrine that will save us, if we abide by it. He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor's wife every night, run horses and gamble. . . . But the doctrine he has produced will save you and me and the whole world.²

Of the period between the years 1820 and 1823, Smith confides:

I continued to pursue my common vocations in life until the twenty-first of September, one thousand eight hundred

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Brodie, op. cit., pp. 145-46.

and twenty-three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision. During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three--having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects, and being of tender years and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, I was left to all kind of temptations, and mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the foibles of human nature; which I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations offensive in the sight of God.¹

Mormon writers try to make it appear that Joseph Smith has been grossly slandered, but it would seem from his own confessions that the charges of his neighbors were not far from the truth. As is natural, Smith touched rather lightly in regard to mention of his own failings; realizing perhaps, that the amount of abuse and criticism called forth would prove more than sufficient to present him in an unfavorable light.

An indication of the manner in which Joseph has been revered and exalted by the Mormon church is exhibited in the official declaration of the church as stated in Joseph Smith An American Prophet, by John Henry Evans: "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it."²

¹Beardsley, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

²Evans, op. cit., p. 7.

Detailed monographs of a psychological nature exist today that attempt to explain Joseph Smith in light of frontier conditions of the early nineteenth century. An explicative offered in support of such psychological investigations is that of professor G. Trumball Ladd, of Yale University:

Joseph Smith, under other conditions than those which actually surrounded him in the first third of the last century, or Joseph Smith under the conditions actually existing anywhere in the country in the last third of the same century, could not have become the founder of Mormonism.¹

The atmosphere of New England in which Joseph Smith was nurtured was influenced greatly by the Great Revival of 1800, which continued to affect the inhabitants of the region until the 1840's. The geographic region of upstate New York was generally thought of as an area of cultural, social, and spiritual barrenness. McBrien observed, "The people of frontier communities were usually characterized by great intensity of feeling and of action. As a rule they were usually either intensely wicked or intensely righteous."² McBrien added:

That there was much drinking, gambling, racing, and profanity, none will doubt: it is equally certain that as to matters religious most of the settlers on the New York frontier were according to their own individual conceptions extremely orthodox, devout, God-fearing men.³

¹McBrien, op. cit., p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 7.

³Ibid.

From this religious confusion there emerged the revivalism and the belief in millennialism which was to pervade the backwoods of New England.

Various theories concerned with economic geography suggest that cyclical conditions serve as determinants of the religiosity, or lack of same, in a given region. Thus, the American frontier, with its democratic spirit and sense of "rugged individualism," encouraged individual enterprise, which in turn, resulted in the evolution of numerous religious denominations and their equally numerous leaders. It was the era of the backwoods in American life. The frontier, and its people, were becoming the dominant force in American society. Frederick Paxson, in his History of the American Frontier, as noted by Beardsley said:

The frontier continued for several decades (following 1810) to provide a following for any teacher who proclaimed a new gospel, or interpreted an old one in a language comprehensible to its spirit. The old ties were broken, the external needs of the human soul continued to prevail, but the common experience of religion needed to be restated in terms of the frontier life.¹

A description of the region that produced the future founder and "prophet" of Mormonism is found in Whitney Cross', The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850:

Across the rolling hills of western New York and along the line of DeWitt Clinton's famed canal, there stretched in the second quarter of the nineteenth century a "psychic

¹Beardsley, op. cit., p. 60.

highway." Upon this broad belt of land congregated a people extraordinarily given to unusual religious beliefs, peculiarly devoted to crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the attainment of millennial happiness. Few of the enthusiasms or eccentricities of this generation of Americans failed to find exponents here. Most of them gained rather greater support here than elsewhere. Several originated in the region.

Some folk called it the "infected district," thinking mainly of the Anti-masonic agitation which centered west of Cayuga Lake. Critics chiefly concerned with the habitual revivalism occurring in a much wider area came to call it the "Burnt" or "Burned-over District," adopting the prevailing western analogy between the fires of the forest and those of the spirit.¹

Millennialism, the religious conviction that Christ and the Judgment were at hand between the 1820's-1845, was interpreted in various ways by historians of the time. Since the first climax of 1800, distinct peaks of religious fervor were in evidence in the "Burned-over District." These peaks were interspersed with periods of relative quiet when almost no religious activity was in progress. Preachers contended that the inhabitants of the "New Country" as it was known, exhibited chronic or habitual proclivities to vice and ungodliness, and were therefore, subject to lapses of dedication to their sects or denominations to which they had devoted their allegiance. It is as if one might on occasion violate

¹Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), p. 3. Cross remained uncommitted on the matter of affinity for either religious attitude in relation to Mormonism.

the Sabbath, be guilty of swearing, and drink to excess, but maintain the hope of another revival to redeem himself.

Another account of the religious unrest and ferment prevalent during this period is noted by Milton V. Backman:

The six decades preceding the Civil War were years of intense religious activity in many sections of the United States. During this second, great awakening, sporadic spiritual quickenings erupted throughout the new nation; and many Americans living in the rugged frontier communities, in the rapidly growing urban areas, and in the villages and towns of northern and southern United States turned their attention to organized religion. Subsequently church membership and religious zeal soared. Although in 1800 there were fewer church members in the country than in any other Christian land and active church membership had dropped to about seven percent of the population the lowest in the history of this land, the decline was arrested; and in 1850, 17 percent of the Americans were churched. By 1860, membership in religious societies increased to about 23 percent of the rapidly expanding American population.¹

Written accounts of early nineteenth century preachers, circuit-riding ministers and self-professed "prophets" of churches referred to as "revealed," indicate that the people of this district were influenced in their daily lives by the fact that Christ was near and would reveal himself within the next few years. Although he never actually predicted the exact year of the millennium or Second Advent, Brodie

¹Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Awakenings in The Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," Brigham Young University Studies: A Voice for the Community of LDS Scholars, IX (Spring, 1969), 301-02.

remarked that Smith once ventured that an "even fifty-six years would wind up the scene."¹

The Smith family was recorded as being among those who were somewhat regular in their attendance at "tent meetings" connected with the numerous sects seeking proselytes to their doctrines and dogma which were represented as being "the true road to salvation." The official organ of the church, the Nauvoo Times and Seasons, stated:

Joseph's mother, sister, and two of his brothers were soon won over to the Presbyterian faith and joined that church. Joseph himself became as he stated it, "somewhat partial to the Methodist sect," and felt "some desire to be united with them."²

Later in his life, while residing at Nauvoo, Smith recalled that the Methodists seemed to be entirely destitute in many respects, but he specifically mentioned the quality of righteousness.

Reference to the significance of millenarianism is noted by Brown, when he stated:

Millenarianism was an important ingredient in nineteenth century revivalism. It inspired revivalists, promoted conversations, and was itself fomented by evangelical fervor. Among the unusual psychological manifestations associated with the Great Revival of 1800 were trances and visions in which unlettered individuals freely predicted the time of the end of the world and the ushering in of the millennium.³

¹Brodie, op. cit., pp. 101-02.

²Nauvoo Times and Seasons, [n.d.], III, p. 727.

³Ira V. Brown, "Watchers for the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIX (December, 1952), 451.

Perhaps the best testimony of the personal character of Joseph Smith can be found in Elder B. H. Roberts', The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo, in which Smith stated:

I do not think there have been many good men on the earth since the days of Adam; but there was one good man and His name was Jesus. Many persons think a prophet must be a great deal better than anybody else. Suppose I would condescend--yes, I will call it condescend--to be a great deal better than any of you, I would be raised up to the highest heavens, and who should I have to accompany me? I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm, yet deals justice to his neighbors and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the long, smooth-faced hypocrite. I do not want you to think I am very righteous, for I am not. God judges men according to the use they make of the light which He gives them.

I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain, and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priest-craft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women, all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them, when their refuge of lies shall fail, and their hiding place shall be destroyed, while these smooth polished stones with which I come in contact become marred. I am a rough stone. The sound of the hammer and chisel was never heard on me until the Lord took me in hand. I desire the learning and wisdom of heaven alone. I have not the least idea, if Christ should come to the earth and preach such rough things as He preached to the Jews, but that this generation would reject Him for being so rough.¹

¹B. H. Roberts, The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, Publishers, 1900), pp. 212-13. Roberts was a Mormon and therefore defensive of the Mormon religion.

II. WAS THE BOOK OF MORMON THE RESULT OF "DIVINE
REVELATION" OR WAS JOSEPH SMITH
ITS FRAUDULENT AUTHOR?

An issue of primary importance and certainly one of the most interesting aspects of Mormonism is the story of the revelation, discovery, and the translation of the famous "Golden Plates" into the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith. Inez Davis Smith recognized the fundamental controversy surrounding the Book of Mormon when she said, "Perhaps from the standpoint of literary critics there never has been a greater literary puzzle than the Book of Mormon."¹ The faithful followers of Joseph Smith believe the book to be a sacred history of a Christian people in ancient America; the book has been labeled a fraud by non-believers.

The Book of Mormon is considered by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as a supplement to the Bible, and is not regarded as superior, or of greater authority than the Bible. Additional sources of the church are the book of Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in a historical manner what is known concerning the "Golden Plates"

¹Davis, op. cit., p. 55.

and the result of these, the Book of Mormon. An attempt will be made to avoid passing judgment upon the authenticity or value of the plates or the Book of Mormon.

Smith was on several occasions severely rebuked by his father for being negligent in his labors and for habitual acts of "day dreaming." While in a state of confusion as a result of the multitude of opposing religions that abounded on the New York frontier, Smith, in his own words related the first step in the revelation of the "Golden Plates" and the religious experience that he had in a letter to John Wentworth, later printed in the Nauvoo Times and Seasons:

I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord; while fervently engaged in supplication, my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded by a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noonday. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them were acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to "go not after them," at the same time receiving a promise that the fullness of the gospel should at some future time be made known to me.¹

Smith recalled that this experience occurred during his fourteenth year and was to prepare him for future communications between himself and angel sent by God.

Consideration of the frequent claims by Smith of visits from angels prompted his family, neighbors, and others

¹Nauvoo Times and Seasons, op. cit., pp. 706-07.

acquainted with him, to dismiss the claims with little thought as to the credibility of them. Receiving encouragement from his family, Smith continued to preserve his faith in the destiny for which he had been singled out. William Smith, a brother of the troubled youth, remarked in a sermon delivered on June 8, 1884, at Deloit, Iowa, "Until after the angel appeared . . . it was never said that my father's family were lazy, shiftless, or poor."¹ Talk of the divine experience dominated the conversation of social gatherings in the immediate locality.

On the twenty-first of September, 1823, while deeply engaged in the activity of prayer, a light grew about him until his room was brighter than a sunny noonday. Then a "personage" appeared at his side, "standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor." Since the robe was open, Joseph could see that he wore no other clothing--"his whole person was glorious beyond description and his countenance truly like lightning."²

Smith later recorded in his monumental work the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, an account of the nocturnal visit of the angel Moroni:

He called me by name and said unto me . . . that his name was Moroni; that God had work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds and tongues. . . .

¹Davis, op. cit., p. 34.

²Carmer, op. cit., p. 6.

He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from which they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants; also that there were two stones in silver bows--and these stones, fastened to a breast-plate, constituted what is called the Urim and the Thummim--deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted "Seers" in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.¹

The angel returned twice more that evening to inform Smith that the plates must not be shown to others, except those persons to whom the Lord commanded they be revealed. Early Mormon legends asserted that Smith was warned that any one who should seek to view the plates without permission, would be stricken blind and the plates recalled unto heaven. He was further instructed not to remove them until specifically directed to do so. It was said that the following day Smith again received directions given him by the angel in his vision, and he located and uncovered the plates. But he was again forbidden to remove them from the ground.

The burden of the visions, conveyed to Smith by the angel Moroni, was that no existing sect represented God's will, that the church of Christ had been withdrawn from the earth, and that God had selected Joseph Smith to restore it. This vision was to become an annual occurrence, and on September 22, 1827, Smith was allowed to unearth the plates

¹Ibid.

from their repository at the Hill Cumorah, near Manchester, Ontario County, New York. Various accounts of the digging up of the plates are in existence and have proven to be highly contradictory.

One account of the unearthing of the "golden plates" is noted by Beardsley:

In the summer of 1827, the elder Smith told Willard Chase that a spirit (not an angel) had appeared to Joe telling him of a record (no mention of a Bible) written on golden plates, which he could obtain by repairing to a given spot, dressed entirely in black and riding a black horse with a switch tail. The family had fitted Joseph out, as directed, and he had found the stone box containing the plates. Upon opening it, he had attempted to pick up the book, and a frog in the box assumed the form of a man, hit him a lick on the side of the head and knocked him three or four rods away. The spirit then told him to come back in a year and he could have the plates.¹

While residing at the farm home of Martin Harris in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Smith began the time-consuming task of translating the characters into the Book of Mormon. While at Harmony, Smith confided to Reverend Nathan Lewis that he dreamed:

. . . of an iron box containing engraved golden plates which he must translate into a book. He attempted to obtain the box and was knocked down by the invisible power. In dismay, he cried out, "Why can I not obtain the plates?" And a Spaniard, with his throat cut from ear to ear and streaming blood, appeared and told him that he must get some one to help him. He returned with Emma, and removed the iron chest and its contents.²

¹ Beardsley, op. cit., p. 49.

² Ibid., pp. 49-50.

On the matter of the decision to attempt to deceive his own family concerning a story of the "golden plates," Smith related to Peter Ingersoll, when asked the reason for his exceptional good humor:

As I was passing through the woods yesterday after a heavy shower of rain, I found a hollow in which was some beautiful white sand washed up by the water. I took off my frock and tied up several quarts of it and then went home. I found the family at the table, eating dinner. They were all anxious to know the contents of my frock. At that moment I happened to think of what I had heard about a history found in Canada, called "the Golden Bible," so I gravely told them it was "the Golden Bible." To my surprise, they were credulous enough to believe what I told them. Accordingly, I said that I had received a commandment to let no one see it, "for," says I, "no man can see it with the naked eye and live." However, I offered to take out the book and show it to them, but they left the room and refused to see it. Now, I have¹ got the damn fools fixed and will carry out the fun.

The task of carrying out the deciphering or translation of the plates into the Book of Mormon was performed by Joseph Smith with the aid of two men to assist him. A blanket was used to construct a background of a curtained alcove inside the farm home of Martin Harris at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in which Smith would be afforded the necessary privacy required to complete the labor which would encompass two years. Smith had married Emma Hale on January 18, 1827, and was accompanied by her to Harmony to carry out the task of translation. Smith was assisted by Oliver Cowdrey, a New

¹Eber D. Howe, Mormonism Unveiled (Painsville, Ohio: Eber D. Howe, Printer and Publisher, 1834), p. 235. Howe was the first writer to write in the nature of the exposé and sought to prove Smith a fraud; extremely hostile to Mormonism.

England schoolteacher who had been impressed with the stories he had heard about Joseph Smith. Cowdrey gave up his position and journeyed to Palmyra for the purpose of discussing with Smith the many stories concerning his "peep-stones" and "money-digging." Smith sat alone on one side of the blanket and translated to Cowdrey, with the aid of the Urim and Thummim, the strange characters which were presented as a composite of "reformed Egyptian," and Hebraic writings.

Ray Allen Billington commented concerning the subject and contents of the Book of Mormon:

This remarkable document, which was destined to be accepted as the Gospel by thousands of the faithful, was a lethally dull volume of 588 pages which recounted the story of America's settlement. First to arrive, according to the Book of Mormon, were a group of dispersed peoples from the Tower of Babel who quarreled so violently that nearly all were killed, although a few remained as ancestors of the Indians. The second comers were God's chosen people, a band of Israelites led by Lehi who found in the promised land of America "all manner of useful cattle and sheep and swine." For a time they prospered, but with the death of Lehi they fell into two factions, one headed by Nephi, the son of Lehi, the other by his brother, Laman. The Nephites, a peaceful people, spread over Mexico and Central America where they left behind evidences of their high civilization in ruins of ancient cities and temples. The Lamanites, on the other hand, moved northward to the present United States where they forgot the God of their fathers and fell upon such evil ways that the Lord darkened their skins to the color of their hearts. For years the two peoples warred, until finally they met in a decisive battle fought near Palmyra in 400 A. D. All the Nephites save Mormon and

his son Moroni were slain; the two survivors spent the rest of their lives recording the story of their people upon the golden plates which Joseph Smith found.¹

Psychological studies of the life of Joseph Smith have brought forth a vast amount of evidence to support the theory that Smith was a paranoid. Riley, who is credited with having produced the most scholarly, in-depth study of a psychological nature, asserted that one of the characteristics of the paranoid individual is in some instances, the impulse to authorship. In The Centennial of Mormonism, Bernard DeVoto remarked on the literary compulsion of Smith to write:

The paranoid impulse to authorship never left him. In the midst of an incredibly busy life--a life filled with ruling thousands of subjects besides speculating in land and stocks, rearing temples to the Lord, maintaining a huge propaganda, perfecting the organization of the church, and instituting the sacrament of celestial marriage--in the midst of all this, Joseph still had time to emit countless pages of bad prose. The stream never ran dry; to the day of his death he was vilifying his enemies and recording miracles in his autobiography, and setting down fresh gospels and epistles, direct from Jehovah. The paranoid faculty for seizing all the flotsam of human thought and converting it to the support of the dominant obsession appears in everything he wrote.²

On the method of translation of the plates, Smith was assisted by four scribes who recorded in long hand the results

¹Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), pp. 535-36.

²Bernard DeVoto, "The Centennial of Mormonism," American Mercury, XIX (January 30, 1930), 5. Extremely critical of Mormonism in all instances.

of his efforts. His wife, Emma, served in this capacity in addition to Cowdery, Harris, and David Whitmer. Smith warned Emma to remember the warning or injunction concerning the fact that no one was to see the plates without permission from God. She never saw the plates although they often lay on the table wrapped in a small linen tablecloth.

Parley Parker Pratt, one of the principal early members of the church, recorded in his Autobiography that Smith received the revelations from God and dictated "each sentence slowly and very distinctly, and with a pause between each sufficiently long for it to be recorded by an ordinary writer in long hand."¹ Mormon accounts include mention of the fact that on one occasion, Smith decreed that death would befall anyone who looked upon the plates, but three men, who would later come to be known as the "Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," apparently gazed upon the plates, and aided in their translation with no apparent harm befalling them. Smith's own description of these plates, and probably the first official one issued by the Mormon church, was in 1842. In February of that year, in answer to inquiries of John Wentworth, Editor of the Chicago Democrat, Smith wrote the following description, which was published in the official newspaper of the church, the Times and Seasons:

¹Parley Parker Pratt, Jr., (ed.), The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt (Chicago: Law, King and Law, 1888), p. 65.

These records were engraved in plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite as thick as common tin. They were filled on both sides with engravings, in Reformed Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume as the leaves of a book, and fastened at the edge with three rings running through the whole. This volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters or letters upon the unsealed part were small and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction, as well as much skill in the art of engraving. With the records was found a curious instrument, called by the ancients the Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal, set in two rims of a bow. This was in use in ancient times by persons called seers. It was an instrument by the use of which they received revelation of things distant, or of things past or future.¹

Martin Harris obtained a copy of the mysterious figures on the plates, and immediately traveled to New York City for the purpose of gaining an interview with Professor Charles Anthon of Columbia University for identification and verification as to their authenticity. Harris took the plates imprints, or facsimiles of the characters found on the plates, to Samuel L. Mitchell, Vice-President of Rutgers Medical College for verification which he failed to secure. Anthon, a Professor of Greek and Latin, was thought to be one of two authorities in the United States relative to ancient writings, Mitchell being the other. Harris gives the following account of what happened at New York City:

¹Charles A. Shook, Cumorah Revisited (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1910), p. 19. Shook can be regarded as in sympathy with Mormonism concerning the legend of the "golden plates."

I went to the city of New York and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and he said that they were the true characters. He gave me a certificate certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said unto me, "Let me see that certificate." I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as the ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, "I can not read a sealed book." I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation.¹

Professor Anthon, fearing that some Mormon writers and historians might misrepresent the interview with Harris, issued the following statement in reply to a letter of inquiry from E. D. Howe:

New York, February 17, 1834.

Dear Sir: I received your favor of the 9th, and lose no time in making a reply. The whole story about my pronouncing the Mormon inscription to be "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics" is perfectly false. . . . This paper was in fact a singular scrawl. It consisted of all kinds of crooked characters, disposed in columns, and had evidently

¹Ibid., pp. 19-20.

been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourished, Roman letters inverted, or placed sideways, were arranged and placed perpendicular columns . . . the paper contained anything else but "Egyptian Hieroglyphics". . . . I have thus given you a full statement of all that I know respecting the origin of Mormonism, and must beg you, as a personal favor, to publish this letter immediately, should you find my name mentioned again by these wretched fanatics. . . .¹

Upon returning home from New York City, Martin Harris prevailed upon Joseph Smith to allow him to take the manuscript, which now consisted of approximately 116 pages, home with him to read to his wife. Mrs. Harris disapproved of Joseph Smith and his activities, and on several occasions, reminded her husband that Smith was in fact, a "fraud and imposter," and was responsible for Harris neglecting his farm work. The disappearance of the 116-page manuscript is described by Shook:

One evening, after reading the story to Mrs. Harris and some "pious friends," he locked the manuscript in a bureau drawer and also locked the door of the room. But, notwithstanding these precautions, on the morrow it was gone. It seems that Mrs. Harris did not approve of her husband's course, and, obtaining the manuscript, consigned it to the flames. Great was Smith's consternation when he learned of the misfortune. He, supposing that the manuscript had been preserved, was fearful lest, if he should write another Book of Lehi, the first would be produced, compared with the second, and the fraud be detected. On the other hand, if this part of the book were not reproduced,

¹George R. Gayler, "A Social, Economic, and Political Study of the Mormons in Western Illinois, 1839-1846: A Re-Evaluation" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Indiana, Bloomington, 1955), p. 10. Gayler attempted to remain uncommitted concerning his sympathy, or lack of same regarding Mormonism.

it would be a tacit confession of the imposture. At this critical time Joseph received another revelation in which he was told that the words of the manuscript had been altered so that they would read contrary to what had been written, for which cause he was commanded not to translate that portion of the plates again so that his enemies might "not accomplish their evil designs in lying against those words."¹

In the month of June, 1829, it was revealed to Joseph Smith that three witnesses were to be chosen, who would be allowed to see the plates and the angel of the Lord. The three men who had faithfully assisted Smith in the task of translation of the plates began to importune him for the honor of being chosen as the "three witnesses." Smith decided to repair with the three men to the woods for the purposes of asking a blessing upon them. Many years later in public interviews David Whitmer described this scene:

It was June, 1829, the latter part of the month . . . the angel showed us the plates. We not only saw the plates of the Book of Mormon, but also the brass plates, the plates of the book of Ether, the plates containing the records of the wickedness of the world and the secret combinations of the people of the world down to the time of their being engraved, and many other plates. The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver, and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun, not like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away around us, I cannot tell how far, but in the midst of this light about as far off as he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer, sitting a few feet from him) there appeared as it were a table, with many records and plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the sword of Laban, the directors, and the interpreters. . . . Our testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon is strictly and absolutely true, just as it is here written.²

¹Shook, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22. ²Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

Thus, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer were chosen as the "Three Witnesses." Sometime before the "golden plates" were recalled unto heaven by the angel of the Lord, eight other men were permitted to witness the "golden plates," bringing the total to eleven who would testify to the authenticity of the plates.

The personal testimony of the "Three Witnesses" is included in the Millennial Star, one of the many newspapers indirectly associated with the official church. Follick presented the testimony of the "Three Witnesses" as follows:

THE TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES

BE IT KNOWN unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engraving thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commandeth us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless

before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY
DAVID WHITMER¹
MARTIN HARRIS¹

Thomas F. O'Dea, writing on the basic theme of the Book of Mormon, attempted to make clear the origin of the American Indian, a subject upon which there had been much speculation. He stated that the arousal of interest in the question of the origin of the American Indian had been stimulated by the discovery of numerous Indian mounds and palisades in western New York and Ohio. O'Dea writes:

The Book of Mormon is concerned fundamentally with the problem of good and evil. It is a story of backsliding and repentance and of apostasy, which projects before its reader the religious sentiments and ideology of western New York and, indeed, of much of postrevival America in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As such, it is an almost completely neglected primary source for the intellectual history of the common man. Its fundamental theme combines the concomitance of righteousness and prosperity of the later Calvinism with the call to repentance and humility of revivalistic Christianity, without either the stress on human depravity of the former or the excessive emotionalism of the latter. It suggests over and over again a cycle that begins with virtue and prosperity and leads to pride and inequality, to social divisions and arrogance, to sin and decadence,

¹Edwin Duane Follick, "The Cultural Influence of Mormonism in Early Nineteenth Century America" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, St. Andrew's Collegiate Church College of the Free Protestant Episcopal Seminary, Los Angeles, 1958), pp. 58-9.

and thence to the Lord's chastisement. This, if it does not end in destruction, is followed by repentance and the reinstatement of righteousness, which lead to prosperity and a recapitulation of the theme.¹

Non-Mormon interpretations of the Book of Mormon can be classified as those that assert that Joseph Smith was the sole author and those who claim that Smith was assisted by Sidney Rigdon, an early Campbellite preacher. Much anti-Mormon comment can be detected in the contemporary newspapers that devoted space to Joseph Smith and his attempts to explain Mormon origins. Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ, published a critical analysis of Joseph Smith and his Book of Mormon, in the Millennial Harbinger of February 7, 1831, under the title "Delusions." The author, Campbell, attempted to authenticate the claims that Joseph Smith was the real author of the Book of Mormon. Declaring the "Prophet" to be "as ignorant and impudent a knave as ever wrote a book" and "betrays the cloven foot in his many errors," Campbell asserted that the style of writing contained in the Book of Mormon "was that of an ignorant person."²

Campbell's exposure of the Book of Mormon as the work of Joseph Smith gave impetus to numerous publications designed

¹Thomas F. O'Dea, The Mormons (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 26-7. Considered as one of the few unbiased accounts of Mormonism.

²Allen, op. cit., p. 244.

to prove Smith an impostor. E. D. Howe, in 1834, published the first major work of anti-Mormon disposition, Mormonism Unveiled. As the editor and publisher of the Painesville Telegraph, Howe associated himself with a certain Philastus Hurlburt, who had been excommunicated from the Mormon Church in 1833 for alleged immorality. Hurlburt had previously collected written affidavits which tended to demean the general character of the Smith family, and therefore, should be regarded as the principal contributor.

The unwillingness of detractors of Mormonism to concede to Joseph Smith either knowledge or talent placed the mantle of authorship upon an individual whom Smith personally urged to become a proselyte, this was Sidney Rigdon. The Spaulding-Rigdon theory or, the "Spaulding theory" as it is known, has received more support than any other theory dealing with the authorship of the Book of Mormon. Hurlburt, after his excommunication in 1833 from the Mormon Church, produced affidavits sworn to by neighbors of Solomon Spaulding, a Dartmouth College graduate and an ex-preacher who lived in Conneaut, Ohio. It was commonly believed that Spaulding who had incurred a substantial debt, desired to publish a historical novel that he had written which was to be an account of the American aborigines. Publication of this novel was prevented by the death of Spaulding in 1816. Neighbors of Spaulding stated that on several occasions Spaulding had read

to them parts of the book; this allowed them to compare the passages contained in the Book of Mormon and conclude that the Book of Mormon was truly a plagiarism of Spaulding literary effort. The Spaulding book was entitled "Manuscript Found," a description of the American Indians who Spaulding believed were the original descendants of the "lost tribes." Non-Mormon critics advanced the theory that Rigdon was able to purchase the manuscript from a Pittsburg printing house and then added a liberal amount of local history and religious terminology common to the times. Upon hearing of the young "seer" who had moved back to New York State, Rigdon journeyed there for the purpose of arranging a meeting between the two to discuss a fraudulent representation of its discovery. After publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, Mormon missionaries were sent to Ohio and Rigdon became a convert or proselyte in the new church.

An extensive examination of the vast amount of supportable evidence pertinent to the Book of Mormon impresses the reader by the magnitude of the accumulation of materials and the willingness to accept this theory by many non-Mormons. Proponents of the theory that Joseph Smith can best be explained in psychological terms, specifically that of the delusory personality, have tended to deny or refute contrary evidence in the Book of Mormon. Bernard DeVoto explained the authorship of the Book of Mormon:

Joseph was, as his first title-page announced, the "author and proprietor" of this Testament. Somehow, whether by an actual reading of it or through the reports of Sidney Rigdon, he had become acquainted with Solomon Spaulding's "Manuscript Found," a Turgid historical novel, built up out of Elias Boudinot's "Star of the West," other speculations of the same kind, and a prose style as lethal as Joseph's own. It circulated widely in manuscript and could easily have come into his hands, as it certainly came into Rigdon's. The prophet's mind seized on this mass of moony nonsense about the Nephites and Lamanites, and welded to it the doctrinal controversies whose reverberations he had heard since infancy and the polemics that Rigdon carried over from the Disciples of Christ. It was a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless, and inconceivably absurd--at once a parody of all American religious thought and something more than parody, a disintegration. The oestrus of paranoia projected it into a new Bible.¹

Stephen S. Harding, who would become a future governor of the Utah Territory was present when the title page of the Book of Mormon was struck. Returning to Palmyra, the vicinity of his birth, Harding had listened to passages read from the original manuscript while at the Smith home. A personal, contemporary account of the printing of the title page of the Book of Mormon at the print shop of Mr. E. B. Grandin of Palmyra is given in Mulder and Mortensen's Among the Mormons:

The printing of the Book of Mormon was proceeding. There was abundant evidence that the proof sheets had been carefully corrected. The printing was done on a lever press of that period; and when a sufficient number of pages for the entire edition of five thousand copies had been completed, the type had to be distributed. This was a slow process in comparison with what is done in a jobbing office of to-day. Mr. Tucker, the foreman, had just

¹DeVoto, loc. cit.

received from Albany a font of new type, and had set up with his own hands the title page of the Book of Mormon, and preparations were now ready for the first impression. About this time the prophet's father also came in. He, too, had evidently heard of my dream, and shook my hand most cordially. Mr. Grandin and two or three typos were present, as if curious in seeing the first impressions of the title page. Tucker took up the ink-balls and made the form ready; then laying the blank sheet upon it, with one pull at the lever the work was done; then taking the impression, looked at it a moment, passed it to Cowdery, who scanned it carefully, and passed it to the prophet himself, who seemed to be examining every letter, and without speaking gave it into the hands of his father and Harris. It was then returned to Tucker. Of course we all looked at it with more or less curiosity, and the work was pronounced excellent. Tucker, who was my cousin, then handed it to me, saying: "Here, Steve, I'll give this to you. You may keep it as a curiosity." I thanked him, and put it carefully in my pocket.¹

The result of the first edition of the Book of Mormon was the eventual formation of the Mormon or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. However, the name given to the original group of six men who were to form the initial membership was Church of Christ; it was only eight years later, in 1838 that the designation of Latter-Day Saints was added.

A meeting was conducted in the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. Those present who were granted membership were Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder and "prophet," his two brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, David and Peter Whitmer, Jr., and Oliver Cowdery.

¹William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, Among the Mormons (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 46. Emphasis of this work is placed upon the modern day structure and importance of Mormonism.

Orson Pratt, who was regarded by some as the philosopher of Mormonism, as M. R. Werner stated: "calculated that April 6, 1830, was exactly 1800 years to the day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ."¹ Additional members were added in the next few months after the organization in April of 1830. With the purpose of adding spiritual solidarity to the neophyte church. Smith's parents, Joseph Smith, Senior, and his wife, Lucy, Martin Harris, Porter Rockwell, who later became the leader of the "Danites" or "Avenging Angels," a Mormon terroristic society organized for the personal protection of the "prophet," and Peter Whitmer, Senior, and his wife were baptized in Lake Seneca. Smith ordained his brothers, which included fourteen year old Don Carlos and wrote letters to his uncles inviting them to become members of the new Church. Now the commissioning of missionaries and sending them into the various regions of New York State and Ohio as well became the primary matter of importance. Sidney Rigdon, himself a Campbellite preacher at the time of his conversion to Mormonism, said in 1837 that "Latter-Day Saint evangelism had puked the Campbellites effectually, no emetic could do half so well."²

¹M. E. Werner, Brigham Young (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925), p. 65. This work presents Brigham Young in a favorable light and assigns to him a role of importance in the continuance of the church after the death of Smith.

²R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840 (Indianapolis: 1950), II, 483.

In describing the Mormon brethren, Orson Spencer, one of few early Mormon proselytes, characterized them in this way:

Our people are mostly the working class of the community, from the United States and Great Britain and her provinces. . . . Our elders are versed in religious polemics, from discussions in the pulpit, stage, bar-room, canal, and steam-boat, and . . . many, very many, are from the most enlightened portion of New England . . . rocked in the cradle of orthodoxy and liberty; accustomed to fatigue, privation, and opposition. . . .¹

On the tenacity and methods of early Mormon missionaries, Gibbs commented: "In the proselyting of the Prophet and his followers there was nothing of delicate persuasion. They knew they were right and went after the 'sectarians' with bare knuckles" of which the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Campbellite preachers so vehemently objected.² This use of physical force suggested that Mormonism was essentially comprised of men of arrogance and egotism. The approach utilized by the Mormon missionaries was to offer acceptance of the new gospel of "eternal damnation."

The rapid increase in the number of proselytes who embraced Mormonism prompted "gentile," or non-Mormon to

¹Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 2. Professor Flanders is a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and entertains some reservations concerning Smith.

²J. F. Gibbs, Lights and Shadows of Mormonism (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Tribune Publishing Company, 1900), p. 59. This effect is essentially pro-Mormon.

observe closely their mode of group or communal living; this was regarded by many as the evolution of what later developed into "Mormon nationalism." Rodman W. Paul in his appraisal of Robert Bruce Flanders' monograph on the Mormon experience at Nauvoo, called attention to the conclusion that Flanders expressed when he wrote that the Mormon Church "developed a trend to political separatism and a kind of Mormon para-nationalism."¹ This growing awareness on the part of "gentile" observers caused a demand for a re-examination of the Book of Mormon with a view of determining the basic dogma and beliefs as stated therein.

Historians and theologians interested in the content of the Book of Mormon have ventured opinions regarding the issues discussed which have given rise to the question of authority of the Church and the scope of its ministry. Alexander Campbell, as noted in Beardsley, commenting upon the Book of Mormon and the issues discussed, stated:

He decided all the great controversies of the eighteenth-twenties: infant baptism, the Trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, the call to ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize and even the questions of Free Masonry, republican government, and the rights of man.²

¹Rodman W. Paul, "The Mormons as a Theme in Western Historical Writing," The Journal of American History, LIV (December, 1967), 520.

²Beardsley, op. cit., p. 88.

With the help of his father and brothers, Joseph Smith journeyed from farm to farm throughout New York State and the upper portion of the state of Pennsylvania. Upon examining the Book of Mormon, prospective buyers were prompted to raise the question, does this book involve faith or intellectual reasoning? An indication of the willingness of people to purchase a copy of the Book of Mormon is reflected in the fact that the original price was set at \$2.50 and was later reduced to \$1.25 as a result of lack of interest on the part of those contacted. Church records reveal that in several instances that Mormon missionaries accepted grain, clocks, clothing, and other forms of merchandise as payment for a copy of the Book of Mormon. Many Mormon missionaries complained that they were accosted and harassed while attempting to disseminate the gospel and at the same time sell the Book of Mormon.

As a consequence of continual questioning as to the beliefs contained in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith submitted a paper to the editor of the Chicago Democrat which summarized the beliefs of the Church and the general principles contained in the Book of Mormon. The result of this effort of Smith to inform interested non-Mormons or "gentiles," was later accepted by Mormons as the thirteen "Articles of Faith."

In support of the claim that Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery stated in 1848 as follows, which is recorded in the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints:

I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages), as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God. . . . I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. . . . That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet.¹

Appraisal and evaluation of the Book of Mormon involves an understanding of the cultural background and the frontier society as it existed during the lifetime of Joseph Smith:

Scholars of American literary history have remained, wrote Brodie, "persistently uninterested in the Book of Mormon. Their indifference is the more surprising since the book is one of the earliest examples of frontier fiction, the first long Yankee narrative that owes nothing to English literary fashions."²

Mark Twain in his criticism of the innumerable repetitions contained in the Book of Mormon, described the book as "chloroform in print."³ Mention was made of the numerous

¹Joseph Smith and Heman C. Smith, History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Lamoni: Board of Publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1911), I, 145.

²Brodie, op. cit., p. 67.

³"Peculiar People," Time, L (July 21, 1947), 19.

selected terms and phrases of a repetitious nature, used for effect, and to stamp the work with an air of Biblical realism. Offered as an example of the repetition encountered was the observation that the phrase "and it came to pass" was detected in approximately 2,000 instances.

As an additional analysis of the Book of Mormon, the observation of Brodie is offered:

His talent, it is true, was not exceptional, for his book lacked subtlety, wit and style. He was chiefly a tale-teller and preacher. His characters were pale, humorless stereotypes; the prophets were always holy, and in the three thousand years of history not a single harlot was made to speak. But he began the book with a first class murder, added assassinations, and piled up battles by the score. There was plenty of bloodshed and slaughter to make up for the lack of gaiety and the stuff of humanity.¹

As a final statement bearing upon the Book of Mormon, the writer would refer those interested in Mormonism and the controversial aspects thereof to the observation offered by Brodie as to the relevance of the Mormon Bible to the present: "If his book is monotonous today, it is because the frontier fires are long since dead and the burning questions that the book answered are ashes."²

A brief examination of the Book of Mormon reveals that Smith was concerned with the growth of his small religious sect and their spiritual welfare amid the spiritual confusion of the

¹Brodie, op. cit., p. 69.

²Ibid.

first half of the nineteenth century. In an exhortation to his brethren to be mindful of the New Testament doctrine as found in Galatians 6:7, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," Smith based the account of the settlement of North America upon this scripture as evidence of the accountability which God would demand from each faithful "saint." Smith reminded his followers of the threat of "eternal damnation" as a means of obtaining strict adherence to his revelations and injunctions.

Brodie observed the referral by Joseph Smith to Martin Harris concerning the matter of the Book of Mormon being a "sealed book," as Smith directed Harris's attention to the Old Testament to the 29th chapter of Isaiah and read him the eleventh and twelfth verses:

And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.¹

This reference was offered by Smith to attest to the fact that in his attempt to translate the "golden plates" into the Book of Mormon he was simply fulfilling prophecy.

According to Linn, David Whitmer in an interview in Missouri in his later years said concerning Smith's lack of

¹Ibid., p. 52.

knowledge: so illiterate was Joseph at that time that he did not know that Jerusalem was a walled city, and he was utterly unable to pronounce many of the names that the magic power of the Urim and Thummim revealed.¹

Smith, it is claimed by some, sought to comply with the Book of Mormon by informing his people of the passage contained in the Book of Alma, chapter 1, 88, regarding his responsibility of providing leadership of his people:

And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried saying, O Lord, have mercy and spare my life that I may be an instrument in thy hands, to save and protect this people.²

Non-Mormons regard this as a further example of the personal efforts of Smith to convince his misguided followers of his "divine inspiration."

Occasionally, Smith was compelled to attend to the various contentions within his people by reminding them of the injunction contained in the Book of Mesiah, chapter 1, 73:

But O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mesiah.³

Whenever organized resistance to Smith's personal authority arose and he was called upon to account for his

¹Linn, op. cit., p. 89.

²Joseph Smith, The Book of Mormon (Lamoni: Board of Publications of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1913), p. 306.

³Ibid., p. 214.

actions which were considered unbecoming a "prophet," he referred the "saints" again to the Book of Alma, chapter 8, 25, 26 to deter their accusations:

But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them, O ye wicked and perverse generation; ye lawyers and hypocrites; for ye are laying the foundations of the devil.

For ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God; ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people.¹

As can be expected conflicting viewpoints are encountered that deal with the literary merit of the Book of Mormon. One school of thought relegates the Book of Mormon as a collection of historical absurdities, while another contends that it is possessed of profound literary merit and includes a degree of historical accuracy.

III. DID JOSEPH SMITH CREATE THE DOCTRINE OF POLYGAMY OR "SPIRITUAL WIFERY" AS A MATTER OF PERSONAL EXPEDIENCY OR WAS THIS THE RESULT OF "DIVINE REVELATION"?

Historians seeking clarification on the matter of polygamy as practiced among the followers of Joseph Smith are challenged by the question, Who originated the idea of plural marriages among the Mormons? Consideration of the domination

¹Ibid., pp. 336-37.

exerted by Smith over his followers, gives rise to the argument that Joseph Smith decreed on only those matters vexatious to the Church. Therefore, staunch Mormons believed implicitly in the discretion exercised by Smith in temporal and spiritual affairs. Recorded testimony indicates that Joseph Smith first speculated that polygamy would yet become an institution in the Church, while engaged in the translation of the Book of Abraham, in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835. Speculation on the subject of polygamy permits personal interpretation to sway the reader in the examination of the facts. Scholars and historians have charged that Smith went into polygamy as a venture with the intention of abandoning the doctrine if it incurred overt hostility and antagonism.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (nonpolygamous), which includes many direct descendants of Joseph Smith, in an attempt to defend Smith against wrong accusations alleges in the words of Linn that "in the brain of J. C. Bennett was conceived the idea, and in his practice was the principle first introduced into the church."¹

Mormon reliance on the Book of Mormon as a source of reference from which to produce justification of the practice of plural marriage or polygamy has caused historians to question the "revelations" given to the "Prophet."

¹Linn, op. cit., p. 272.

The revelation dated July 12, 1843, which Joseph Smith reportedly received at Nauvoo, Illinois, dealing with polygamy and the doctrine of "plural wives" is given in the Documentary History of the Church, Volume V, page 423, and is here alluded to by Mullen:

God commanded Abraham and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law, and from Hagar sprang many people. This therefore was fulfilling, among other things, the promises. Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? "Verily I say unto you, Nay, for I the Lord commanded it. Go ye therefore and do the works of Abraham. But if ye enter not into my law ye cannot receive the promise of my Father which he made unto Abraham. I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph an appointment and restore all things."¹

Mormon writers appear to be unapologetic when called upon to defend the doctrinal beliefs of their church. The doctrine of polygamy is defended with arguments of a sociological nature supported with biblical scriptures and passages from the Book of Mormon. It is the doctrine of polygamy or "spiritual wifery," that has proven to be the exception to the Mormon disposition which acknowledges polygamy in theory, yet would deny its practice.

Mormon declarations on the subject in the Book of Mormon specifically discourage the emulation of the Old Testament

¹Robert Mullen, The Latter-Day Saints: The Mormons Yesterday and Today (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p. 74. The author is a non-Mormon who stated he would attempt to present only facts thereby avoiding any partiality.

patriarchs, namely, David and Solomon. As evidence, Linn submits the commandments found in the Book of Jacob ii, 24-28, of the Book of Mormon:

Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me saith the Lord; wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

Wherefore, I, the Lord God, will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. Wherefore my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the work of the Lord; for there shall not any man among you hath save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; for I, the Lord God, delighteth in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.¹

Soon after the formation of the church in New York State, Smith and Sidney Rigdon concerned themselves with the formation of the Church in Ohio. It was in Kirtland, Ohio, that Smith was to receive the first revelation in conjunction with the abominable practice that was to remain inseparable from the public view of Mormonism and the character of Joseph Smith. Brodie remarked that when questioned concerning the principle of marriage, Smith frequently referred to the commandment in the Old Testament Book of Exodus: "And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife."²

¹Linn, op. cit., p. 273.

²Brodie, op. cit., p. 297.

Smith, in keeping with his Puritan conscience, was compelled to examine the basic tenants of the institution of marriage before publicly espousing a church policy regarding the matter. With the realization that hostility directed toward the Mormon Church was in essence, a result of economic failure that resulted in defaulting on contractual agreements, Smith found it necessary to deny publicly the growing charges of polygamous conduct among the Mormons. Reminded of his affinity for women, Smith once confided to a friend: "Whenever I see a pretty woman, I have to pray for grace."¹

When asked by his dying mother, "If you had your life to live over again, would you do as you have done--I mean live in polygamy?" Smith was heard to reply, "I would that, the principle of plural marriage is true, and, if properly lived, would redeem woman from slavery and put her on a higher plane than she has ever occupied before. There would be no prostitution in the world, and every normal woman would have a husband and children."²

Mormon writers have presented selected arguments which have their basis in sociological thought, as to the justification of the practice of polygamy or "spiritual wifery." The argument that women were additional sources of labor, more numerous in the number of converts or proselytes, and necessary for an increase in the growth of the church membership have formed the basis of contention submitted by the official church.

¹Ibid.

²Evans, op. cit., pp. 266-67.

Anti-Mormon critics are quick to point to the fact that a certain freedom of expression can be ascertained on the part of the official church when questioned about doctrine, commandments, and principles of faith. This is accompanied by an unpleasant silence when questions arise on the subject of polygamy, and a pretense of lack of knowledge is offered in response. The writer has experienced this treatment while visiting a Mormon establishment in search of historical background materials with which to supplement this study.

In reference to a quarrel involving Smith and Dr. John C. Bennett, whom the majority of Mormons regard as the perpetrator of the infamous practice of polygamy, and the credulity of the Mormons, Stenhouse, in The Rocky Mountain Saints observed:

With a people who subordinate their own judgment and sense of right and wrong to authoritative teaching, it was an easy matter for any doctrine to be introduced, however false and vicious it might be; and when to that disposition in the people is added their constant expectation of mysterious revelations, there is no extreme of folly or crime which may not be easily imposed upon their credulity. Bennett's relations with the Prophet being of the most intimate character, it was easy for him to succeed in imposing upon silly women the "spiritual-wife" doctrine as an emanation from Heaven; and this he is charged with doing with a success that is humiliating to confess.¹

¹ P. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints (Salt Lake City: Shepard Book Company, 1904), pp. 183-84. Definitely a harsh criticism of Mormonism.

To condition the minds of the faithful, Joseph Smith instructed various members of the church press to publish written justification of polygamy before the proclamation was announced publicly. Udney H. Jacob produced such a document based upon Old Testament precedent:

What, although a woman is not known to be an adulteress, yet she may be a perfect devil to her husband, train him in the most imperious manner, despise him in her heart, abuse him before his children, drive him like a menial slave where she pleases; and he must tamely submit to the ungodly law of his wife, must hug the serpent to his bosom, and love her as he does his own body! Impossible, and degrading to the nature of man.¹

The pamphlet according to historians, suffers from repeated instances of gross exaggeration and is to be regarded as a reflection upon the married state of Jacob, and possibly upon that of Smith as well. Although the title page bore the name of J. Smith as printer, this was later proven to be false.

Mullen observed that Brigham Young displayed an obvious degree of reluctance when first approached by Joseph Smith on the subject of polygamy:

"If any man had asked me what was my choice when Joseph Smith revealed the doctrine," said Young, "I would have said, let me have but one wife. I was not desirous of shrinking from any duty, nor of failing in the least to do what I was commanded, but it was the first time in my life that I desired the grave and I could hardly get over it for a long time."²

¹Brodie, op. cit., pp. 298-99.

²Mullen, op. cit., pp. 74-5.

As a testimonial to the fact that the American frontier was alive with communities experimenting with communal living of a sexual nature, DeVoto offers the following observation:

The prophet's extraordinary sexual energy reinforces the diagnosis of paranoia. In all America, at that time, the flesh was strangely restless. The countryside was spotted with colonies of idealists who were perfecting marriage. Throughout New England, New York, and Pennsylvania a traveler might find a new Eden every few miles, and the tide of hopefulness had spread to Ohio and Indiana. Many of these Utopias were composed of admirable people, sincerely if impotently grappling with problems that civilization has ever failed to solve. . . . The most famous as well as the most successful, was, of course, John H. Noyes's Oneida Community, at Oneida there was a reasoned, scientific system. The atmosphere was one of grave intelligence; the communists were decent people voluntarily associating for the betterment of their own relations. It is significant that every one of Joseph's few allusions to Noyes is a ribald sneer. . . . Here Joseph's natural inclinations carried him along. The daughters and wives of his converts were comely, and eager to be gracious to the Lord's anointed. But at first their fathers or their husbands murmured, and a whisper ran through the church. Policy demanded a revelation from God. Thus a rationalization of Joseph's impulses fastened on his church the institution that eventually came near destroying it.¹

An excerpt of a letter written by John Humphrey Noyes, the founder of the free-love community at Oneida, to a friend in 1836, was published in the Philadelphia Battle-Axe:

The marriage supper of the Lamb is a feast at which every dish is free to every guest. In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should

¹DeVoto, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

be. . . . The guests of the marriage supper may each have his favorite dish, each a dish of his own procuring, and that without the jealousy of exclusiveness. I call a certain woman my wife, she is yours; she is Christ's; and in Him she is the bride of all Saints. She is dear in the hands of a stranger, and according to my promise to her I rejoice.¹

Joseph Smith at the writing of Noyes's letter in 1836, had come to be regarded as somewhat of a "frontier opportunist." Claims have been advanced that Smith applied this text to his doctrinal beliefs and began to implement same during the late 1830's.

As evidence of the light in which the practice of polygamy and "spiritual wifery" was regarded by native Illinoisians, who were non-Mormon or "gentiles," a comparison is offered of the manner in which the Mormons were welcomed to the state of Illinois in 1839, and the public sentiment that prevailed in the summer of 1841. Cecil A. Snider observed:

Practically all that was known about the Mormons came through local newspapers of small circulation. When the conflict between saint and gentile arose in Missouri, the press took it up, and week by week the Illinois newspapers became filled more and more with accounts of Mormon persecutions. At once a sympathetic attitude toward the Mormons expressed itself in these newspapers. It is almost needless to say that this attitude prepared the way for the introduction of Mormonism into Illinois. Public opinion became extremely sentimental and ultra-sympathetic. The prestige of the sect was raised as a

¹Brodie, op. cit., p. 186.

result long before its arrival. There seems to have been no trace of antagonism on the part of the Illinois press to lower this prestige.¹

The implication drawn is that the Illinois populace had little or no foreknowledge of the practice of polygamy and "spiritual wifery" previous to the arrival of the Mormons in 1839. This statement is to be contrasted with that of a leading national newspaper of the day, the Niles National Register of July 3, 1841, as cited in Gayler which reported:

The excitement on both sides of the river is increasing very fast. The conduct of Jo Smith and the other leaders is such as no community of white men can tolerate. It is the entire absence of all moral and religious principle that renders them so obnoxious to the Gentiles of all denominations, wherever they reside.²

John C. Bennett, who was to become the arch-traitor of Mormonism, is accused of being the person who was to introduce Joseph Smith to the doctrine of polygamy. Stenhouse presented a somewhat contradictory view when he expressed the idea that "Many even of the 'good Mormons' have always believed that Joseph Smith taught Bennett of the proposed introduction of polygamy, but that Bennett ran ahead of his teacher, and introduced free-loveism in its broadest sense."³ Bennett, who was to incur the wrath of

¹Cecil A. Snider, "Development of Attitudes in Sectarian Conflict: A Study of Mormonism in Illinois in Contemporary Newspaper Sources" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1933), p. 9.

²Gayler, op. cit., p. 156.

³Stenhouse, op. cit., p. 184.

Smith the "prophet," and suffer excommunication in 1842, wrote in the Logansport Telegraph, July 30, 1842, of the sexual prowess of Smith, which was to become the basis of his violent "exposé" entitled The History of the Saints: An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism, Smith had "seduced not only hundreds of single and married females, but more than the great Solomon."¹

In reference to his severance from the Mormon Church, Bennett was quick to assert that he never at any time was to be considered a believer. In his History of the Saints, Bennett stated in his own words his motive for joining the Mormon Church:

It at length occurred to me that the surest and speediest way to overthrow the Impostor, and expose his iniquity to the world, would be to profess myself a convert to his doctrines, and join him at the seat of his dominion. I felt confident that from my standing in society, and the offices I held under the state of Illinois, I should be received by the Mormons with open arms: and that the course I was resolved to pursue would enable me to get behind the curtain, and behold, at my leisure, the secret wires of the fabric, and likewise those who moved them. . . . The fact that in joining the Mormons I was obliged to make a pretense of belief in their religion does not alter the case. That pretense was unavoidable in the part I was acting, and it should not be condemned like hypocrisy towards a christian church. For so absurd are the doctrines of the Mormons that I regard them with no more reverence than I would the worship of Manitou or the Great Spirit of the Indians, and feel no more compunction at joining in the former than in the latter, to serve the same useful purpose.²

¹Gayler, op. cit., p. 160.

²John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints: An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston: 1842), pp. 6-9. The first writer to use the term exposé in his title to denote his intent.

It was during the Kirtland period of the church that Joseph Smith gave an indication that a premature form of polygamy was to be practiced by himself. It was to an attractive seventeen-year-old girl, Fanny Alger, an orphan, that Joseph Smith first attempted to put into practice the teachings and revelations concerning polygamy; this was accomplished when Smith persuaded his wife Emma to extend to Miss Alger the offer of room and board. It was soon rumored that Miss Alger and Smith had secretly married, and, as a result of the enjoyment of the marital prerogative, the young girl became pregnant. Irving Wallace in The Twenty-Seventh Wife pointed out that a neighbor, Fannie Brewer, later swore in an affidavit:

There was much excitement against the prophet, on another account, likewise--an unlawful intercourse between himself and a young orphan girl residing in his family, and under his protection!!! Mr. Martin Harris told me that the prophet was most notorious for lying and licentiousness!!!¹

Emma Smith reportedly was not of such a disposition to condone a plural, or polygamous marriage, and informed the girl that she would be turned out from the Smith home. Numerous proposals emanating from Smith were refused by wives of prominent elders and concealed from the Mormon populace.

¹Irving Wallace, The Twenty-Seventh Wife (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 43. Definite tendency to dwell upon the injustice of polygamy, therefore, must be regarded as anti-Mormon.

The first incident in Nauvoo which involved a proposal of polygamous marriage that later came to be common knowledge among the other "saints," was the incident created by Brigham Young when he proposed to an eighteen-year-old English girl, Martha Brotherton. Arrangements were made between Smith and Young to confront Miss Brotherton in private, which involved the use of an often used room above Smith's store. Young then began the ritualistic religious mutterings so common to such extramarital courtships. Included were the recitation of selected biblical scriptures sanctioning such endeavors to be accompanied by the statement that Joseph Smith had received a revelation in justification of polygamy. The preliminary discussion conducted by Young, as mentioned in Brodie, began with these words:

Brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives. . . . If you will accept of me I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom, and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here today, and you can go home this evening, and your parents will not know anything about it.¹

Miss Brotherton, who offered the excuse that she had not been allotted sufficient time to make a decision, informed Young that she would require additional time to meditate and could not be expected to make an immediate decision. Brigham

¹Brodie, op. cit., pp. 306-07.

Young, perplexed by the reply of the girl, summoned Smith into the room and related to him the course of conversation.

Smith then enjoined the young girl:

Just go ahead, and do as Brigham wants you to, He is the best man in the world, except me. If you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed--God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you . . . and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me, and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off, I will take you on.¹

The incident was recorded by the girl and the manuscript displayed for her parents to witness. The family made the decision to depart for St. Louis, but proceeded to broadcast the affair and circulated the details throughout the city of Nauvoo before their departure. Smith, anticipating a disclosure of the incident, took precautionary measures to stifle the gossip and any criticisms resultant. An account of the encounter was furnished by Miss Brotherton for publication in the St. Louis Bulletin, July 15, 1842.

Previous to the public announcement of the revelation concerning polygamy, Smith, on Wednesday, July 12, 1843, confided to his brother, Hyrum and his secretary William Clayton that he was greatly concerned about the prospects of revealing his decision to his wife Emma. Hyrum Smith informed the two men that he felt Emma could be dealt with. "If you will write the revelation on celestial marriage," he told his brother, "I

¹Ibid., p. 307.

will take it and read it to Emma, and I believe I can convince her of its truth, and you will hereafter have peace." Smith was then heard to reply, "You do not know Emma as well as I do."¹

The task of dictation of the revelation was then completed by Smith and Clayton, with a sense of apprehensiveness guiding their efforts. The contents of the draft of the revelation contained a clarification of the granting of plural marriage, which was stated herein:

If any man espouse a virgin and desires to espouse another, and the first give her consent; and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him . . . and if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery for they belong to him and are given unto him; therefore he is justified.²

As a further testimony to the attempts of the Mormon "prophet" to gain the affections of the women of Nauvoo, Bennett here makes disclosure of a letter written by Joseph Smith from Springfield, Illinois, to Mrs. Emeline White, a "gentile" living in the city of Nauvoo; this is contained in his History of the Saints:

My Sweet Emeline:

"You know that my love for you, as David said to Jonathan, is 'wonderful passing the love of women.' And how can that be? You know it is only figurative. I mean you have my most supreme affections. O that I had yours as truly!

¹Wallace, op. cit., p. 50.

²Ibid., pp. 50-51.

May I not hope that it will be so? At all events, be my friend, my best friend, my best friend. If you want anything while I am gone, call upon either of the Bishops,--Vinson Knight or Alanson Ripley,--and show them the signature of 'Old White Hat,' and they will provide for you. Do not be afraid to receive anything from me, and these men are confidential. You need not fear to write me; and I do assure you that a few lines would be very consoling on a journey. Sign it 'Rosanna.'

Your humble servant,

Old White Hat.¹

Charlotte Haven, a young gentile resident of Nauvoo, wrote in her series of letters that were published as "A Girl's Letter's from Nauvoo," in the Overland Monthly for December, 1890:

A few Sabbaths ago Joseph announced to his people that the gift of prophecy was taken away from him until the Temple And Nauvoo House should be finished, but that his mantle had fallen on his brother Hyrum, to whom it belonged by birthright, and he charged his people to obey implicitly all the commands revealed to Hyrum. We hear that he has already had some wonderful revelations not yet made public, but that a few of the elders put their heads together and whisper that they dare not speak aloud. A month ago or more one of the apostles, Adams by name, returned from a two years' mission in England, bringing with him a wife and child, although he had left a wife and family here when he went away, and I am told that his first wife is reconciled to this certainly at first unwelcome guest to her home, for her husband and some others have reasoned with her that plurality of wives is taught in the Bible, that Abraham, Jacob, Solomon, David, and indeed all the old prophets and good men, had several wives, and if right for them, it is right for the Latter Day Saints. Furthermore, the first wife will always be first in her husband's affection and the head of the household, where she will have a larger influence. Poor, weak woman!²

¹Bennett, op. cit., p. 235.

²Mulder, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

Extreme in their willingness to exploit the Bible as a source of justification of the institution of polygamy, Mormon elders and churchmen brought forth arguments which have evoked varying emotions. One such example is the discourse delivered on several occasions and presented publicly by Orson Hyde in March, 1857, at Salt Lake City in which the argument or assertion that Jesus Christ was a polygamist was resorted to:

It will be borne in mind that, once on a time, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and on a careful reading of that transaction it will be discovered that no less a person than Jesus Christ was married on that occasion. If he was never married, his intimacy with Mary and Martha, and the other Mary also, whom Jesus loved, must have been highly unbecoming and improper, to say the best of it. I will venture to say that, if Jesus Christ was now to pass through the most pious countries in Christendom, with a train of women such as used to follow him, fondling about him, combing his hair, anointing him with precious ointments, washing his feet with tears, and unmarried or even married, he would be mobbed, tarred, and feathered, and rode, not on an ass, but on a rail. . . . Did he multiply, and did he see [sow?] his seed? Did he honor his Father's law by complying with it, or did he not? Others may do as they like, but I will not charge our Saviour with neglect or transgression in this or any other duty.¹

Reflecting upon the ever-increasing amount of anti-Mormon writings of the period of the 1840's, Davis made the following observation:

We should recall that this literature was written in a period of increasing anxiety and uncertainty over sexual values and the proper role of women. As ministers and journalists pointed with alarm at the spread of

¹Linn, op. cit., p. 288.

prostitution, the incidence of divorce, and the lax and hypocritical morality of the growing cities, a discussion of licentious subversives offered a convenient means for the projection of guilt as well as desire. The sins of individuals, or of the nation as a whole, could be pushed off upon the shoulders of the enemy and there punished in righteous anger. . . . John C. Bennett, whom the Mormons expelled from the Church as a result of his flagrant sexual immorality, invented the fantasy of "The Mormon Seraglio" which persisted in later anti-Mormon writings. According to Bennett, the Mormons maintained secret orders of beautiful prostitutes who were mostly reserved for various officials of the church. He claimed, moreover, that any wife refusing to accept polygamy might be forced to join the lowest order¹ and thus become available to any Mormon who desired her.

As has been previously stated, John C. Bennett, who gained the immediate friendship of Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders, was rewarded with titles such as Mayor of Nauvoo, President of Nauvoo University, and Major-General of the Nauvoo Legion. The personal friendship of Bennett and Smith persuaded the residents of Nauvoo that the Lord had blessed the "Saints" with the leadership necessary to the solidification of the church. Close examination of the character of Smith has revealed an inability to submit to any division of authority which would relegate the "prophet" to the state of subservience in certain matters. Quaife, who wrote regarding the many separatist elements which caused the

¹David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVII (September, 1960), 219-20.

eventual schism of the Mormon Church, remarked:

Bennett was possessed of a fertile mind and an insatiable penchant for directing everything within the orbit of his observation, and to this propensity were ascribable alike his meteoric rise to fame and power, and his sudden downfall therefrom.¹

The value of a contemporary observation of an individual acquainted with the reputation of Bennett before his induction into Mormonism is to be accorded maximum consideration. Thomas Ford, who served as the Governor of the state of Illinois during the Mormon occupation of Nauvoo, offered this evaluation of Bennett:

This Bennett was probably the greatest scamp in the western country. I have made particular inquiries concerning him, and have traced him in several places in which he lived before he had joined the Mormons in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and he was everywhere accounted the debauched, unprincipled and profligate character. He was a man of some little talent, and then had the confidence of the Mormons, and particularly that of their leaders.²

Within the city of Nauvoo, rumors were widely circulated that the one time cordial relationship between Smith and Bennett had reached the point of confrontation in respect to the problem of polygamy. Bennett assumed the initiative in the matter when he resigned as Mayor of Nauvoo on May 19,

¹"The Kingdom of St. James: A Narrative of the Mormons," p. 35, cited by George R. Gayler, A Social, Economic, and Political Study of the Mormons in Western Illinois, 1839-1846: A Re-evaluation (Bloomington: The University of Indiana, 1955), p. 170.

²Thomas Ford, History of Illinois (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Company, 1854), p. 263. Served as governor of the state of Illinois during Mormon settlement of Nauvoo, was sympathetic to Mormons for a time, then came to regard them as a source of trouble.

1842. Smith explained that Bennett:

. . . having discovered that his whoredoms and abominations were fast coming to light, and that the indignation of an insulted and abused people were rising rapidly against him, thought best to make a virtue of necessity, and try to make it appear that he was innocent, by resigning his office of mayor. . . .¹

The immediate reaction of Smith to this unexpected course of action was to excommunicate Bennett from the Church. Indications are that Smith gave a great deal of thought to the possible repercussions of such an act, and, suggested to Bennett that an attempt to smooth over the disagreement be affected as quickly as possible. Smith intimated that Bennett would be allowed to "resign" in good faith. On May 17, 1842, two days prior to Bennett's public resignation as mayor, Smith wrote to the Church recorder, James Sloan: "You will be so good as to permit Gen. Bennett to withdraw his name from the Church Record, if he desires to do so, and this with the best feeling towards you and Gen. Bennett."² Four days later, on May 21st, Sloan replied to Smith: "I have permitted Gen. Bennett to withdraw his membership from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, this 17th day of May, 1842--the best feelings subsisting between all parties."³

¹"History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," Vol. V, p. 12, cited by George R. Gayler, A Social, Economic and Political Study of the Mormons in Western Illinois, 1839-1846: A Re-evaluation (Bloomington: The University of Indiana, 1955), p. 170.

²Ibid., p. 171.

³Ibid.

Immediately after his departure from Nauvoo, Bennett preoccupied himself with the publishing of accounts in mid-western newspapers amenable to the printing of stories of a definite anti-Mormon bias. The first articles appeared in the Sangamo Journal of Springfield, Illinois, which rapidly gained the reputation of being in support of the opposition elements against the church. The result of these articles was a series of tours which included the presentation of lectures informing the populace of the eastern United States of the several crimes and sins committed in the name of religion within the walls of the Mormon city which came to be known as a "modern Babylon." Following the publication of numerous letters in the newspapers of both, Iowa and Illinois, in which threats made by Joseph Smith upon the life of Bennett were presented, the latter began his attacks upon Smith in earnest. Singling out the Mormon hierarchy with the Council of Twelve Apostles, Bishops, and Archbishops specifically mentioned, Bennett stated:

The Mormon hierarchy are guilty of infidelity, deism, atheism, lying, deception, blasphemy, debauchery, lasciviousness, bestiality, madness, fraud, plunder, larceny, burglary, robbery, perjury, fornication, adultery, rape, incest, arson, treason, and murder; and they have outheroded Herod, and out-deviled the devil, slandered God Almighty, Jesus Christ, and the holy angels. . . .¹

¹Bennett, op. cit., p. 257.

The doctrine of "Spiritual Wives" was proclaimed at approximately the same time as polygamy. The Mormon Church expressed the belief that the Scriptures omitted women from those who would be permitted to enter heaven unless first "sealed" to an elder for "time and eternity." The implication being that an unmarried woman would be denied entrance to the gates of heaven because only through a husband could she expect salvation. A definition of the doctrine of "Spiritual Wifeism" is here presented:

And I would say, as no man can be perfect without the woman, so no woman can be perfect without a man to lead her. I tell you the truth as it is in the bosom of eternity; and I say to every man upon the face of the earth, if he wishes to be saved, he cannot be saved without a woman by his side. This is spiritual wifeism, that is, the doctrine of spiritual wives.¹

Mormons claimed at the inception of the doctrines of polygamy and "Spiritual Wifeism," that the two were virtually inseparable and must be adhered to in the strictest sense. Women were persuaded that salvation would be denied them unless they availed themselves of the opportunity to marry.

Sir Richard Burton, a prominent nineteenth century soldier, explorer, poet, archaeologist and linguist, conducted a study of the alleged vile sexual practices of the Mormons and Joseph Smith. In his findings, he made this evaluation of polygamy:

¹Linn, op. cit., p. 287.

The Mormon household has been described by its enemies as a hell of envy, hatred, and malice, a den of murder and suicide. The same has been said of the Moslem harem. Both, I believe, suffer from the assertions of prejudice or ignorance. The temper of the new is so far superior to that of the old country, that, incredible as the statement may appear, rival wives do dwell together in amity; and do quote the proverb "the more the merrier" I believe that many a "happy English home" is far stormier despite the presence of monogamy.¹

Finally, the question of determining the origin of the doctrine of polygamy and its author becomes at once a matter of individual interpretation dictated by the "frame of reference" the investigator brings to the subject. Plentiful evidence exists in the form of diaries, written affidavits, Church Records, Smith's own History of the Church, newspaper accounts, passages found in the Doctrines and Covenants, and memories of conversations conducted with those of high position, that would furnish ample material for the supporter of the theory that Smith sought to exploit the womanhood of Mormonism for his personal gratification. The possibility that Smith adopted this practice at the suggestion of Bennett or others cannot be denied.

The "true Believer" will reconcile himself with the belief that faith is the sole explanation necessary to the understanding of the matter of the doctrine of polygamy, and

¹ Fawn M. Brodie, The Devil Drives (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 184-85.

its companion, "Spiritual Wifery." Once again the objectivity of Brodie is presented as an explanation of Smith's actions in regard to polygamy and "Spiritual Wifery":

Joseph could with a certain honesty inveigh against adultery in the same week that he slept with another man's wife, or indeed several men's wives, because he had interposed a very special marriage ceremony. And who was to say him nay, since in the gentile world the simple pronouncement of a few time-worn phrases by any justice of the peace was all that was necessary to transform fornication into blessed matrimony. The spoken word stood between him and his own guilt. And with Joseph the word was God.¹

The writer admits that to establish or put forth a conclusion or judgment as an estimation of an individual personality of a preceding era is neither prudent nor advisable on the part of the inexperienced historian. Therefore, the actions of Joseph Smith are to be judged in terms of the values and traditions of the age in which he lived.

Research into the background of Joseph Smith reveals an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty in regard to his personal estimation of himself and suggests a degree of confusion concerning contemporary accounts as to his character during his formative years. Anti-Mormon chroniclers are able to produce a wealth of evidence in support of the theory that Smith was a "ne'er-do-well" who spent his time in idleness and attempts to avoid honest labor. Mormon writings abound that attempt to dispel or debunk the idea that previous

¹Ibid., p. 308.

to the establishment of the Church in 1830, Smith had accomplished anything noteworthy. Historians have suggested that Smith was representative of the family background from which he emerged. Throughout the greater part of his life he remained relatively unschooled, deficient in his understanding of the practical affairs of business, and determined in his efforts to fulfill the destiny to which he had dictated for himself. Distrusted by his neighbors, despised by his father-in-law, and generally regarded as capable of nothing of merit, Smith busied himself with matters connected with the establishment of the "true church."

Again, conflicting evidence exists that would tend to corroborate the claims made in behalf of both the pro-Mormon and anti-Mormon dispositions related to the authorship of the Book of Mormon. Internal criticism and literary analysis conducted by historians and literary critics, imply that the Book of Mormon is the result of a conscious effort on the part of some individual to retell the settlement of the North American continent, specifically the portion known as the United States, in terms of a migration of wandering tribes of Israel, who became the ancestors of the American Indian. There are those who claim that Joseph Smith in conjunction with Sidney Riedon utilized an old manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding and added to it an application of some

of the existing social and religious problems of the day. In opposition to this widely held view, Mormons have held the view that the Book of Mormon was the result of "divine revelation" and is to be thought of as a historical explanation of the settlement of this country and is to be used as a supplement to the Bible.

The matter of determining the responsibility for the creation of the doctrine of polygamy and "spiritual wifery" cannot easily be decided. Religion and personal bias will dictate the attitudes and views entertained by those interested in seeking an accurate, factual explanation of this controversy. Anti-Mormon critics of Joseph Smith maintain that polygamy was introduced by Smith as a means of recourse to self-gratification due to an enormous sexual appetite. Mormon supporters make the claim that Smith was introduced to the idea by John C. Bennett, thereby implying that Joseph Smith was not the originator of the doctrine of polygamy.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The history of the United States has been essentially the attempts of a people to assert their individual initiative when confronted with restraints of society through the utilization of social, political, and religious institutions, which promote the exercise of democracy and individual freedom. The creation of a religious institution in the form of a church is exemplary and serves to illustrate the degree of toleration that the American society has displayed when presented with the challenge.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to: (1) investigate the current literature in the field of historiography with a view of carrying out a valid historical research project, (2) investigate the historical literature relative to the life of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, (3) make a comparison of the conflicting viewpoints of pro-Mormon and anti-Mormon writers and attempt to determine the effects and contributions made by Joseph Smith to

American history, and (4) create a mental image of the man himself as background material for a better understanding of the religious movement which bears the impress of his personality.

Importance of the study. The importance of the study was to allow the writer to familiarize himself with the techniques and methods of the independent researcher seeking to facilitate a study in historiography.

In addition, a concomitant aspect of the importance of this study would be to furnish valuable experience to the writer as a high school history teacher to restrict himself with a given set of events, circumstances, and occurrences within a specific time spectrum and attempt to formulate a series of conclusions based upon research and acquaintance with numerous sources, both primary and secondary.

Procedure. The procedure used to complete this study was library research carried out in numerous midwestern libraries. An investigation of the methods, techniques, and procedures of historiography was conducted to acquaint the writer with the accepted authorities in the field of history and their voluminous writings which serve as a guide for the novice attempting to acquire the familiarity with methods and source materials necessary to such a study.

A perusal of the vast number of resources, both primary and secondary, the works of a definite bias, either pro or anti-Mormon, were consulted to render this study as a valid attempt at historical accuracy.

Definition of terms. Selected terms considered essential to the study were utilized to communicate the meaning of words that were contemporary during the lifetime of the subject of this study. Words commonly used by Mormons and non-Mormons alike to indicate the religious significance of each are here included to provide accuracy and authenticity.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The American frontier of the nineteenth century was productive of many strange legends and folklore which recounted the efforts of various individuals who reacted to the religious stimulus provided by the puritanical surroundings and the frontier conditions as they existed. The degree of toleration gave rise to numerous religious sects and denominations which claimed as their origin the spirit of revelation from God. Joseph Smith, a young New England farm boy, epitomized the spiritual turmoil and unrest which was characteristic of the era in which he lived. Regarded by those acquainted with him as an itinerant, a vagabond, a

"ne'er-do-well," an opportunist, who was quick to perceive the spiritual and social inexperience of countless people who were victimized by their own bewilderment, Joseph Smith experienced a meteoric progression that was to culminate in martyrdom.

Conflicting estimates of the character of Joseph Smith present the researcher and historian with a challenge to extract the truths from the myths and legends. The problems of traditional suspicions and bias have brought about many skepticisms concerning the religious origins of Joseph Smith. Accredited as a "lecherous fraud" and a "rogue" by many, Smith founded or created a religion which was to cause many to worship him in the sense that he was to be charged with the restoration of the "true" church.

Interested students of American religions are able to detect nothing novel in the fact that the restoration of the "true" church had occurred with ever-increasing frequency during the ten-year period previous to the creation of the Church established by Smith. An anonymous Frenchman, paraphrasing another, had already remarked that "America, which could contrive only one soup, had invented a hundred religions."¹

The fact that Joseph Smith was a remarkable person cannot be denied. There are those who would point to the

¹DeVoto, op. cit., p. 2.

analogy between Abraham Lincoln, who was a relative unknown previous to the Lincoln-Douglas Debates and Joseph Smith who was also unknown previous to the founding of his church in 1830. Both were eventually to gain the attention of masses of people who initially held the two men in disregard. The comparison of the impact and the forcefulness which each man exerted reveals that their personality compensated for an obvious lack of formal education and familiarity with the social amenities and graces of the times.

An explanation of the dominion which Smith enjoyed over his followers necessitates the recognition of the fact that he ruled more so by personality, than by the alleged divinity of his message. In social conversations which required public appearances on the part of Smith, it became obvious that the lack of intelligence and judgment ascribed to him detracted from his message and personal appeal. It was said that his handsome physical appearance, wit, and habitual good humor compensated for the shortcomings of his character and allowed him to be at his best in personalized situations.

The Reverend Henry Caswell in his Prophet of the Nineteenth Century gave this interpretation of Smith: "An original cunning led to deceitful measures for . . . money. These led to spiritual power, and . . . ambition. Ambition

. . . ultimately produced . . . projects of the most unbounded conquest and spoliation."¹ Mormon responses to this estimation are not to be considered as complete repudiations of this possibility. Church spokesmen have on occasion substantiated this claim, but invariably qualified their response with the additional comment that Smith acquired the traits of courage and ability as he advanced from one revelation to the next.

In the quest for group solidarity, Joseph Smith urged his co-religionists to adopt the concept of American materialism which would prove to the "gentile" that Joseph Smith and Mormonism were realistic byproducts of the frontier preoccupation with democracy. Smith suggested that his followers could successfully harness the potential within the Church for labor and utilize it to benefit the entire body of "saints." Smith intimated that a small group of individuals within the Church could organize a cooperative effort dedicated to the betterment of each "saint" in a material sense. Application of the cherished American reverence for the principle of "practical mysticism," was early recognized and adopted by Smith. Constant urging of the "saints" to exert their efforts of labor for the betterment of the Church and the glorification of God formed a spiritual bond that was a bond of unity. At every opportunity Smith inveighed against self-glorification.

¹Hill, op. cit., p. 420.

In the words of Hill:

A man is a better farmer or a better carpenter when he believes that by plowing an acre or shingling an out-house he is making himself into an archangel, confounding the Gentiles and glorifying God. And because he is a better workman he is making more money for himself and for the directors of his society.¹

His obvious disregard for many of the cherished traditions and institutions of America prompted some to refer to him as a "nineteenth century director." His apparent desire to unite the church and state was in direct violation of the accepted philosophy prevalent at the time. Advocacy of communal style living discouraged the desire for extensive ownership of private property by the "saints." The eventualities that might have occurred as a result of his announcement in 1844 of his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States are certainly deserving of consideration. That he was in the process of creating a frontier society or authoritarian dominion cannot be denied. He had advanced to the stage wherein he had created an army, the Nauvoo Legion, a propaganda ministry, and a secret police, the Danites, all of which caused observers to note the authoritarian nature of his rule. Eastern newspapers acknowledged that a despotism, aggressive in character, was being constructed in the West.

¹DeVoto, op. cit., p. 11.

As a prelude to his announcement of his candidacy in 1844, Smith announced earlier in December of 1843 that a Mormon petition was to be presented to Congress asking for political autonomy for the city of Nauvoo. If granted, this would guarantee that the city of Nauvoo would be regarded as an independent federal territory. Displaying his lack of faith in Congress, Smith remarked:

I prophesied by virtue of the holy Priesthood vested in me, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, if Congress will not hear our petition and grant us protection, they shall be broken up as a government and God shall damn them, and there shall be nothing left of them--not even a grease spot!¹

The heart of Smith's political platform centered around the hypothesis that individual freedom in the United States was eventually to succumb to calamity which would destroy the peace of the world.

"The world is governed too much," he wrote, "and there is not a nation or a dynasty now occupying the earth which acknowledges almighty God as their lawgiver, and as 'crowns won by blood, by blood must be maintained,' I go emphatically, virtuously, and humanely, for a Theodemocracy, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness."²

In response to the campaign documents circulated by Joseph Smith, Eastern newspapers projected various forms of editorial criticism:

¹Brodie, op. cit., p. 356.

²Ibid., p. 364.

"Who is this modern Knight with his magic lamp?" asked the Boston Correspondent on May 22. It is the Green Mountain boy of Old Vermont--the ignorant farmer of western New York, the unlettered fool of sectarian tales; the scourge and terror of out-lawed Missouri, the favorite Military Chieftain of Illinois . . . the admired of millions . . . the dread of politicians, the revered of savages; the stumbling block of nations, and the wonder of the world; and to cap the climax, he is 'JO SMITH THE MORMON PROPHET.'"¹

The death of Smith on June 28, 1844 at the hands of a vengeful mob while incarcerated at Carthage, Illinois, and the resultant martyrdom deprived him of the opportunity to challenge his "gentile" opposition for political supremacy. The indecisiveness of Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois is acknowledged as a possible explanation of the series of unfortunate episodes that occurred in Hancock County.

Prodie, offering a final estimate of Joseph Smith, commented:

Joseph in his own person provided a symbol of nearness to God and a finality of interpretation that made the ordinary frontier evangelist seem by comparison all sound and fury. There was a great hunger in his people, and they accepted him for what he set himself up to be. They believed the best of him and thereby caused him to give his best. Joseph's true monument is not a granite shaft in Vermont, but a great intermountain empire in the West.²

Josiah Quincy offered in analysis of Smith the following comment which was made after a brief visit to Nauvoo in 1844: this comment represents the viewpoint of the writer as

¹Ibid., p. 365.

²Ibid., p. 404.

well: "If the reader does not know what to make of Joseph Smith, I cannot help him out of the difficulty. I myself stand helpless before the puzzle."¹

McBrien, writing in agreement with Josiah Quincy, wrote that "the wonderful influence which this founder of a religion exerted and still exerts, throws him into relief before us, not as a rogue to be criminated, but as a phenomenon to be explained."² This study is therefore dedicated to the belief that Joseph Smith is explicable if he is to be considered in relation to his environment; therein the stimuli for his writings and activities may be found.

¹Mulder, op. cit., p. 142.

²McBrien, op. cit., p. i.

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